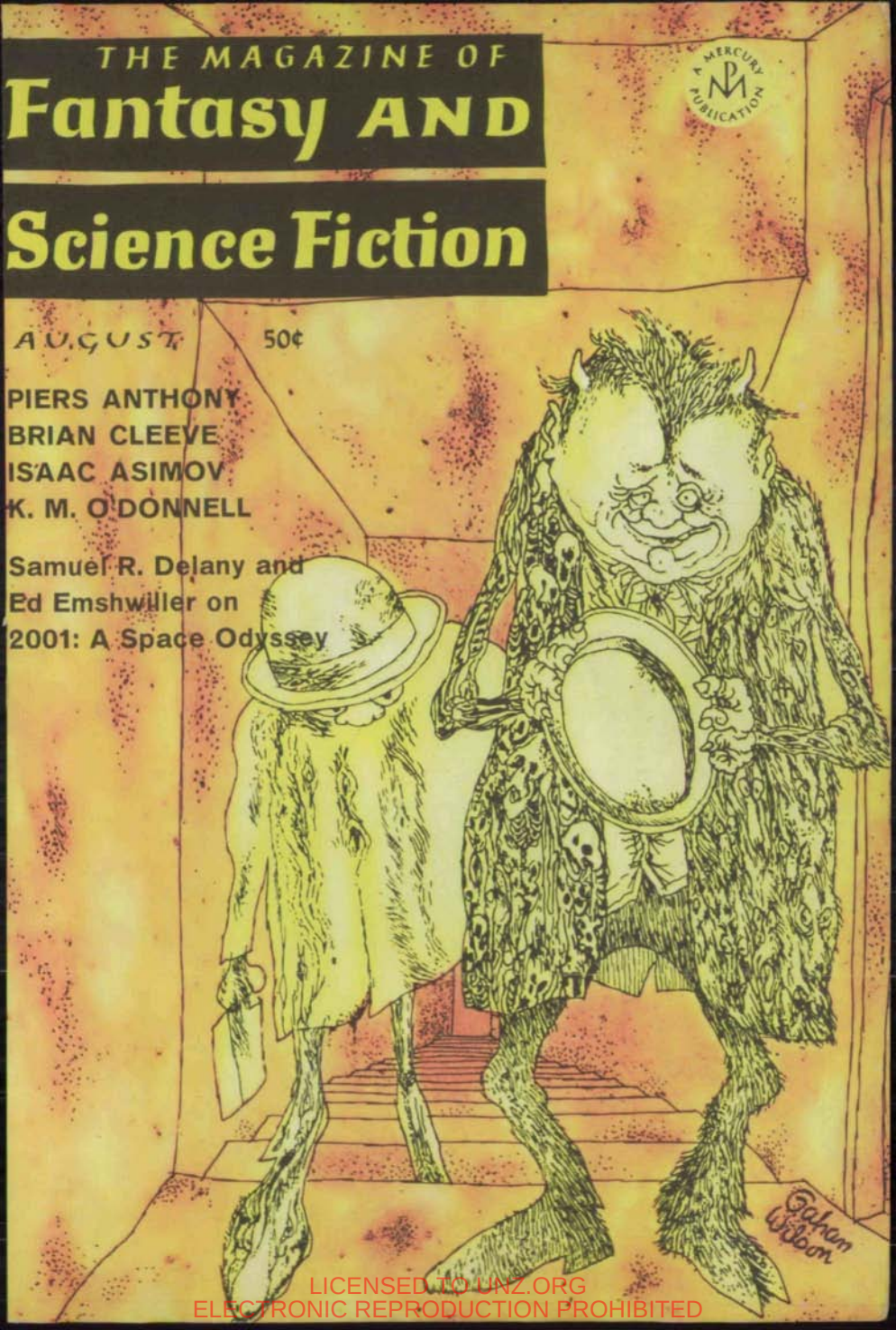

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Fantasy and Science Fiction

AUGUST *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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Cover by Gahan Wilson for "The Devil and Jake O'Hara"

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ANTHONY BOUCHER

Anthony Boucher, writer, editor, reviewer, and co-founder of this magazine, died April 29, 1968. He was my oldest and dearest friend. Along with countless readers and writers of fantasy and science fiction, I mourn his passing. His loss is irreplaceable.

Tony Boucher was justly famed in the field of the detective story as a writer, reviewer and editor. But in discussing his achievements for F&SF, I feel I should emphasize the twin fields of fantasy and science fiction.

A Boucher science-fantasy story always bore the trade-mark of excellence. His work was distinguished by ingenuity of plot, boldness and originality of concept, and strength of character. Such unforgettable stories as *Mr. Lupescu, The Other Inauguration,* and *Nine Finger Jack* were anthologized many, many times.

But it was as the editor of F&SF that Anthony Boucher attained his highest stature. He combined an unerring sense of what was "commercial" with excellent literary taste. Moreover, he was the kindest editor I have ever known. Countless "old pros"—Anderson, Asimov, Bretnor, Garrett, Heinlein, Knight, deFord, Wellman, to name but a few—will attest to his always available help and counsel.

He was especially gentle with beginning writers. Tony hated to use the printed rejection slip; if a story showed any promise at all, he was ever ready to take the time for *written* encouragement, with detailed suggestions for plot revision, or character strengthening or style polishing.

F&SF received much praise for varied achievements under Boucher's aegis, but his proudest boast was the number of first stories he had bought. Many of these fledglings are now well established practitioners of the writing craft; I like to think that it was the early help that Boucher gave them that started them on their way to fame . . . if not precisely to fortune.

Anthony Boucher was the Renaissance ideal of the universal man, accomplished in the arts, the sciences, and most accomplished of all in the ordinary decencies of every day living. He was a man who, "take him all in all, we shall not see his like again."

—J. Francis McComas

Strangely, it is only when friends die that we begin to realize how much they have become a part of us. It is so easy, then, to conjure up the living image in our minds, so hard to comprehend the absoluteness of the loss. This is especially so when death comes unexpected, and when the friend was vital and intelligent and many-faceted, unique as a person and a personality.

I first met Tony Boucher eighteen years ago, when he bought my story, "The Gnurrs Come From The Voodvork Out," for the second issue of *Fantasy and Science Fiction.* During

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the ensuing years of his editorship, he bought many another—but that is less important than he was himself. Often I was his guest. Sometimes he was mine. When my wife was ill, he and his wife were very kind to her; after her death, their kindness was to me. Over the years, I remember him most vividly as a poker table companion and antagonist—in other words, you poker players, as a friend.

When a writer dies, something of himself already has become a part, not only of his friends, but also of all those who have read his writings. When an editor dies, when a critic dies, the same is true. Anthony Boucher, H. H. Holmes, Herman W. Mudgett, and William Anthony Parker White lives on in us, his friends and readers.

It is good to remember this, but it is only a small consolation. If even Wellington could weep for his dead friends, then so can we.

—R. Bretnor

To "Speak no ill of the dead" is, as refers to Anthony Boucher, a proverb without a point, for I never heard anyone speak ill of him while he was alive. Our acquaintance lasted just eighteen years; in the Hebrew language, where every letter is also a number, the number 18 spells "life." I do not know if anyone can count the number of writers whose lives as writers began with the warm encouragement he gave them; I only know that I am fortunate that I may count myself among them. In the mellow and genial sun of his personality bloomed many a plant.

It is darker than it used to be.

—Avram Davidson

Tony loved the world and found beauty in it everywhere. With his death that beauty is not now so strong. We must manufacture that beauty—and wit and warmth and love—back once more, so that it will be as it was before he left it. When I think of Tony I think of music, because he understood and had for his idols the kindness and drama that music contains. With music, as with everything else he carried into his heart, he was in some mysterious way merged with it; he did not merely hear but in this strange way added himself to the music, so as to change it. I knew Tony for almost twenty years, and he did for me such powerful things that I am not the person I would have been if there had been no Tony Boucher. Here is a poem he loved, the last text of Schubert's *Die Schöne Müllerin:*

Good night, good night!
Until all awakens.
Forget your joy, forget your sorrow!
The full moon rises,
The mists disperse,
And the sky above, how vast its arch!

—Philip K. Dick

Tony Boucher—everybody called him Tony—had a rich and complex personality. He was the best of editors, a witty, constant and tactful friend, and the author of some mystery novels that I still remember with much pleasure. As a critic he had no equal. But I think that the remark that fits him best is something I heard him say once about a common acquaintance: "Oh, he's a lovely man." It is painful to have to put that remark in the past tense.

—Margaret St. Clair

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In THE DEVIL AND DEMOCRACY *(November 1966), Brian Cleeve gave us a funny account of unionization and a general strike in Hell. In an effort to get the machinery of evil rolling again, the Devil and his assistant go topside, and in this sequel conduct a most difficult search and destroy mission. Their objective is a strike-breaker, and in this day and age, it's not easy to find a man sunk so low in sin and vileness that he'd cross a picket line.*

THE DEVIL AND JAKE O'HARA

by Brian Cleeve

DID YOU EVER HEAR ABOUT HOW the Devil was trying to get back into Hell the time it was unionized, and about how Jake O'Hara was to help him? Oh, a murderous story, murderous. And Jake's daughter? Finula? And how Police Constable Hegarty got to be a Superintendent and won the medal? You didn't? Never? Wait there till I tell you.

You mind Jake O'Hara at least? But you don't mind him the way I mind him, years back, when he was drinking like Finn's salmon and was barred and banned out of every respectable pub in London. You don't mind him then, I'll bet. A great big awkward bony crag of a boyo, with red hair and freckles, and half his teeth missing where friends had kicked them out of him away back when he still had friends, and nothing in the world in his favor except his daughter Finula and her true love for him.

A fine girl, God bless her, like a young galleon in jaunty sail, black hair rippling in glossy ringlets on her head, and green eyes flashing, it'd do your heart good to see her, so long as her eyes weren't flashing at you, and she with a left hook that would flatten a sailor. And more than once she'd used it, I can tell you, gettin' her da out of scrapes that he was too far gone in liquor to get out of by himself.

But anyway, imagine one Saturday morning and Big Jake stretched on a vacant building site with enough bad whiskey inside him to set fire to the Thames, his ugly mouth gaping and his breath

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snorting and rattling in the depths of unconsciousness. His head on a brick and his feet on another and his pockets as empty of money as his heart was of virtue. And there comes Finula, ready for blue murder, after being told by someone that her da was stretched as usual after spending his dole money the night before.

"If I could catch the villains that do be leading him astray, the poor innocent," she wailed over him, the ugly wretch, that deserved nothing but a stiff boot in the ribs. And Police Constable Hegarty approaching also, who was just the handsome, upright young police officer who'd have been prepared to give him exactly that if he hadn't loved Finula to distraction.

So between the two of them they wake him up and sit him up, with young Hegarty brushing his fingers against hers as they lever Big Jake off the bricks and the lumps of cement where he's been sleeping, and the love leaps in Phelim Hegarty's heart like a fish, and lies on hers like a weight because she knows, ochone, that if she was to marry Phelim her dreadful da would hang round both their necks like a stone and ruin them. And whatever about herself she would die three deaths before she'd see the bright future of Phelim blasted because of her father. What chance would he ever have of becoming a sergeant with a father-in-law that was the scandal of Bermondsey?

"Oh Janey," Big Jake is crying, "me head, me stomach, if I could get that greasy swine that sold me that rotgut, I'd put me foot down his throat till I could kick his kidneys. Oh me eyeballs. I'd sell my suffering soul for one decent bottle of pot still Irish, by the holy cripes I would. Oh Janey, me head."

"Don't be saying such things, father darling," Finula whispers in a scared voice. "Not even in joking." And she looks over her sweet, powerful shoulder as if she expects to see the Devil himself there with the bottle and the contract. But all there is is two small men with sandwich boxes and hungry looks.

"Will we give you a hand with him?" says the dark one, and don't they pick up Jake's feet that are like a couple of bulldozers in size twelve boots—many's the wicked time he used them for what they weren't meant to be used for, even on Finula's saintly mother, God rest her soul in Heaven, and the constable takes him by the craggy shoulders, and the three of them carry him, cursing the gentlest bumps and lurches they give him, all the way to the tenement house where he lives with Finula, and all the way up seven flights of stairs to the freezing attic room that she tries to keep clean and decent with a stick of furniture and a bit of cretonne and two old mattresses on the floor for beds. Oh a dreadful misery of a place, yet breathing the dear care she gives it.

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So they dump him down on one of the mattresses and Phelim settles his helmet on his head and shuffles his feet and says he has to be getting back on the beat or the sergeant'll have his life, and Finula goes down to the street door with him to thank him, saying to the two wee men that she'll wet the tea for their kindness if they'll wait for her a minute.

And the second she's out of the door doesn't one of them, the dark one, bend down by Big Jake's ear and say very softly— "Here's the bottle of whiskey, Jake. And more where it came from. Is it a deal?"

Jake stares at the whiskey like it's a mirage. Then the cork is out and the neck in his throat and he sucking at it like a calf at an udder. But divil a drop of whiskey comes out of it. The liquor stays upside down as if it was solid.

"The deal first," says the Devil, for who else was it except Himself? "The deal, Jake astorre. Your soul for the liquor, and a small matter of pulling a switch when you get down below. Is it a deal now? Quick before herself gets back."

"It's a deal, damn you," snarls Jake round the neck of the bottle, and feels his free hand gripped by the small horny one of Himself, and the split second their hands shake, doesn't the whiskey liquefy and go glug-glug down the raw funnel of Jake's throat. Half of it in one breath, and the other half in two more, and he falls back paralyzed with a kind of twisted smile on his ugly mush, and light plumes of smoke coming out of his ears as if he was being kippered. When back comes Finula, sees the empty bottle falling from his speechless grasp, takes in at least part of the situation with one daughterly glance and catches the Devil such a swinging open-hander on his left lug that she knocks him flat.

"As if I haven't enough," she says in a low, dangerous voice, thinking of the conversation she'd just had with Phelim. "Marry me," says he, "or else," says he, leaving her to imagine whether the "else" was that if she didn't, he'd go off and marry Rose McCarthy from the Harp and Crown that had been after him for years past, or that next time he found Big Jake paralytic he'd throw him in the nick and stomp the rest of his teeth out —which is against the rules for police constables to do but has been known to happen.

And since it was for Phelim's sake, rather than Big Jake's or certainly her own, that she was holding back, she was in a right mood to bat anyone on the lug, let alone a man giving her poor father a bottle of whiskey for his breakfast.

"Me hat," screams the Devil, which same hat has fallen off and rolled into a corner, and he grabs for it and claps it back on, but too late. For hasn't Finula seen the two

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wee horns on his baldy forehead, and the fierce widow's peak of him darting between them. And she's that stomached with fright and shock that she can't raise her hand to bless herself or open her lips for a pious ejaculation. At least for that second. And the Devil thinks that his hour is come, because if a young Irish girl of virginity and beauty of spirit was to let fly at him with a pious ejaculation, the belt on the ear Finula had just given him would be nothing to it.

"Wait," he says. "Don't be rash. Let's discuss this like decent people without recourse to vulgarity or violence."

"Vulg—" Finula starts, her bosom heaving (and a sight that made, I can promise you). "Vulgari—"

"I have him," says the Devil. "I have yer da fast, and anything in the way of a nasty altercation between you and me is going to do him no good, if you're after plain speaking. Now will you hold your whisht long enough to let me talk to you?"

"Hold me—" Finula pants, her lovely hands turning into sizeable fists, and beating against her sizeable bosom. "If I hit you again it won't be with me flat hand, you nasty, dirty, villainous little—"

"Now, now," says the Devil, backing out of reach, "let's be calm. You want to marry Phelim Hegarty, am'n't I right? And you want your da to stop drinking and be respectable? Am'n't I still right? Supposing I write that into the deal? As a bonus?"

"Marry Phelim?" she says faintly. "Me da stop drinking?" she says, fainter. "Be respectable?" she whispers, so faint you couldn't hear her.

"Signed and sealed," says the Devil. "In front of a witness. Belfy, you're witness."

And the other wee gurrier takes off his ugly hat and makes her a bow. "Your servant, ma'am," he says.

"What's more," says the Devil, "I'll make Phelim a Superintendent inside a twelve month. With back pay for the rank since last April."

"Back pay?" whispers Finula.

"And just for the hell of it I'll give Rose McCarthy a dose of warts that would frighten a bullock."

"Warts?"

"No less. And your da so respectable and well got up that he'll be on television."

"Mercy," whispers Finula.

"Is it a deal?"

"On television?"

She hardly feels the horny wee hand grasp hers and begin to shake it. Half of her expects fire and brimstone and smells of sulphur, and the other half is wondering if money will start falling through the broken windows, and a wee fragment of her between the two halves is thinking "warts", with a far from pious satisfaction. For it's a terrible truth, and a bitter sorrow

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to me to be obliged to repeat it, but never a soul fell into temptation but it was kind of canted over to one side, so to speak, before the fall. And in the case of Finula, it was Rose McCarthy that had done the canting. A blonde, simpering half-wit of a strumpet that had never anything in her mind but the one thing, only the fellers were all too sotted with her contours and her gooseberry eyes to realize it—the one thing being their pay packets, of course.

Between the two of them, Finula O'Hara and Rose McCarthy, there wasn't the shadow of a fraction of a doubt which a sensible man would choose, even if he was judging only on the level of contours, but the doubt had sometimes crossed Finula's mind, at least in this respect, as to whether Phelim was entirely a sensible man. And Rose McCarthy hadn't Big Jake for a father and a millstone. Just a sweet old widowed mother that kept a cake shop. And Phelim's abiding weakness was a sweet tooth.

"Oh mercy," whispered Finula. And there she was alone in the attic with her father snoring on the huge flat of his back and the sound of the Devil and his greasy assistant scampering down the dirty stairs like two rats, and as pleased as Chinamen.

"We have them," screeches the Devil, "we have them surely."

"You have that," says Belfy, and out they go into the innocent sunshine skipping and sniggering, and feeling that after the long years of misfortune and misery, their evil luck had changed at last. For let me tell you, for fourteen years past there had been few unhappier creatures in these islands than the same Devil and his minion Belfagor.

It all began the time Hell was unionized. I told you about that. Unionized? Red revolution more like, and the Devil and Belfy escaping by the skin of their wings and landing up in Kerry. Bad enough for them, you'd think, having to emigrate at their time of life and neither of them young any more. But worse came on them. Hell went on strike.

It was all over Mrs. O'Leary as a matter of fact, and her claiming that she was being victimized for being a shop steward in the Call Girls' Union and jacking up the rates. She lay there on her griddle, the shameless strap, screeching that the lads torturing her was nothing but hired lackeys of the boss class and a disgrace to the Stokers' Union, until along comes the shop steward, and she cons him into calling an unofficial strike on the grounds of victimization and shop stewards' solidarity.

So, there's a shop stewards' meeting, and a union meeting, and a splinter-group apprentices' meeting, and a ginger group meeting, and a breakaway union meeting that wants a laborers' union with double-time for playing blackjack

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at weekends instead of just time and a half for Sundays the way it was then; and between one meeting and another there wasn't a stim of torturing done for a week, and at the end of it there's fourteen strikes going at the one time, and not a dead sinner in the place with an idea as to how to begin to start settling the least one of them. Until the deep place was reduced to a total shambles, and in the end even the maintenance devils came out, and the power supplies was cut entirely.

Which meant that the Devil and Belfy, who up till then had had ways of plugging in on the power lines of Evil, so to speak, even though they was in exile, were brought at last to total destitution. Even the bottle of whiskey for Big Jake had to be bought in advance out of their National Assistance money, and the tiny effort of keeping the whiskey suspended solid in the bottle for ten seconds while they made the bargain left the Devil out of funds of Evil for the next six weeks. Parlous the state he was in. And if he was bad, what poor Belfy suffered was beyond talking. His past ten meals had been fished out of dustbins. You see, they could *see* things, but they couldn't *do* things, if you follow my meaning. They could *see* Big Jake from a mile off, and the bargain that there'd be that morning for a bottle of pot still Irish whiskey. But could they conjure that whiskey out of nothing the way they was used to in the bad old days? Could they hell. Not a drop. Not a cork. Not a label. They were reduced to buying it on their dole money like any other poor out-of-work thirsty slob. I can tell you they nearly died of shame doing it.

But spend a penny, make a pound. Once they had Big Jake, they had leverage. They could see the opportunities and he could take them. So that within a couple of months—long enough to get Big Jake dried out and sensible—they were all on the pig's back. New suits. Tan boots. Tyrolean hats. Belfy had a Malacca cane with a silver knob, and the Devil had a gold one. And as for Big Jake! Platinum teeth for a start. Ruby buttons on his waistcoat. Gold tags on his shoe laces. And Finula near drowned in mink. She even had mink pajamas, except that they gave her hay fever. While poor Rose McCarthy—Covered. Warts like carbuncles. Couldn't sit down for them. Covered.

And all from playing the horses. The Devil gives Jake the winners and Jake plays them. They had to use Belfy's dole money for the first stake, but after that! You see, according to the rules of the game, the Devil wasn't allowed to gamble. I mean to say, where would it have ended if he could? All he could do was to put someone else up to it and split the takings. If he could get them off the winner,

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which he usually couldn't. So he'd given that up this while back. But with Big Jake he had a hold, so to speak. Yet even that came unstuck, because after a couple of weeks of some really remarkable doubles and trebles, the bookies wouldn't take a bet off Big Jake, nor anyone connected with him. Just wouldn't take the littlest dollar, let alone anything that would have given them all a real killing.

So what was there for it but to turn to crime? Not that any of this took the Devil by surprise. I ask you. Counting on it, more like. Because it wasn't gold-headed Malacca canes and fancy hats that Himself wanted out of Big Jake. It was a strikebreaker. And that's not an easy thing to find in a day and age like this. Adulterers, murderers, forgers, men that'll give their ever-loving partners a couple of black eyes on a Saturday night, child beaters, defaulting solicitors, dishonest advertisers, they're two a penny, ten a penny. But a strikebreaker. A scab. A man sunk so low in sin and vileness that he'd cross a picket line. That man would be damned hard to find and you looking for him until Doomsday.

But that's what the Devil had seen in Big Jake at the first glance. A man that'd spent his working life, such as it had ever been, scabbing, undercutting, sucking up to the foreman for the cushy billet, every rotten trick in the scab's handbook was second nature to Big Jake, and this was the whole and soul reason why he was wanted by Himself. To slide past the pickets and the blackjack players and switch on the power again.

And once *that* was done, and the strikers and the shop stewards and the sinners and the apprentices was running every which way and accusing each other of breaking the sacredest rule in the whole Sinner's Lexicon—thou may rob thy old blind mother, but thou shalt not scab—and the factions and the parties and the splinter groups and the unofficials and the strike leaders was beating each other over the ears with picket signs and lengths of four-by-two and the like, *then* in slips Himself and Belfy—or so they plan—and in no time at all Himself is back on the Infernal Throne talking sweet reason and salary increases to all concerned and offering to call in arbitrators. Or so he reckons.

But first Himself has to keep his side of the bargain with Big Jake, and incidentally with Finula and Phelim. In as much time as it takes to buy a few sawed-off shotguns and get a gang together, Big Jake is a Napoleon of crime. Protection. Crooked bingo games. There isn't a hole or corner of organized crime that Big Jake doesn't have his thumb in, and a right genius he proved to have for it. All he'd ever needed was the fair chance, as he'd always said himself, and there doesn't the Dev-

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il and Belfy give it to him. Tip-offs about this. Tip-offs about that. Divil a chance the police had of cornering Big Jake, I can tell you. The Bank of England they robbed: The Post Office they robbed. The Prime Minister's residence at number ten they robbed and stole his stamp collection along with his presentation gold-banded briar pipe from the King of Siam, or maybe it was the Shah of Persia.

And all the while me bold Phelim wasn't forgotten, because while Big Jake's gang would be operating with total immunity from legal interference, the Devil and Belfy would be handing over the opposition gangs to Phelim, caught *in flagrant delights,* as they say at the Old Bailey. So Phelim is a sergeant, at which date he marries Finula, and then he's an inspector, and then he's a Super, with a reputation as the biggest crime-buster since Solomon. And of course, nothing will do the new Super but to go after the mysterious Mr. Big, as Jake has come to be known in the rougher parts of London. Not that Phelim knew it was his father-in-law he was after, naturally. "Get me me briar pipe back!" screeches the Prime Minister, "and I'll make you the assistant commissionaire of Scotland Yard. I'll rechristen it Irish Yard. I'll do anything for ye," says he, "if you'll only get it back for me."

And off roars the bold Superintendent Phelim in his powerful Z-car and sends out his network of agents and stool pigeons, and the Devil deciding that the time is now ripe for a bit of the real action, he fulfills the last of his bargain and gets Big Jake onto TV, on the Solomon Snow program. And if that isn't the heighth and breadth of respectability, I ask you, what is?

There's Big Jake in a silk suit with uranium buttons and Solomon Snow fawning on him like he was the leader of a rebel colony and they get on like a house on fire. While at the Superintendent's semi-detached, the Devil knocks on the door and says "Ahem, Super" when the Super opens it. "Don't mention to the missus that I told you," says he, "but that character on the telly," he says, "is Mr. Big," he says. The kind of message, of course, that he's often given to Phelim, but only about lesser fry than Mr. Big.

"Me da-in-law?" says Phelim, thunderstruck, because he'd been given to understand by Finula and Big Jake that Big Jake is something in the City after coming in for a large legacy from his aunt in Australia. "Me own darling's da?" he whispers.

"The same one," says the Devil, "and you'd find him this very hour plottin' murder and ruffianism in his Park Lane apartment, with the evidence and proceeds of his nefarious robberies strewn round him like Aladdin's Cave," says the

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Devil. "But take care," says he, "for he's vowed to shoot on sight if an officer of the law so much as breathes through the keyhole. If I were you, I'd try the service lift and bring an equalizer." And thereupon the Devil vanishes in his mini-minor with a puff of smoke out of the chromium exhaust pipe.

Minutes later, round the Devil goes to Big Jake and says, "Hell knows what rat split on us Chief, but that son-in-law of yours has got the lowdown on you," he says, "and he's gunning for you," says he, "and swearing to get you like a monkey on a stick. He's likely to be round within the hour."

"We'll blast him," screeches Belfy, and the gang gets out the sawed-off arbitrators, and they barricade the doors of the superb Park Lane fourteen-room apartment that Big Jake has as his business pad. But as advised, Phelim comes up the service lift, which the Devil has left conveniently unbarricaded, and he bursts in with his trusty sergeant and his trusty police constable driver and they see the state of armament in the room and they blast Big Jake where he stands, having previously obtained a special license to carry firearms from a qualified magistrate, that being the law and necessity of such actions in Park Lane.

And of course the gang and Big Jake are not doing nothing while they are getting blasted. They are blasting right back and they make a terrible mess of the Superintendent in particular and create grievous wounds in the sergeant and the heroic police constable driver who afterwards both receive medals. But Big Jake and Phelim are lying flat on the Aubusson carpet gurgling their last, so that Phelim's medal has to be strictly posthumorous. "Well, well," says the Devil. "One for us and one for them," and he tosses the poor soul of Phelim out of the window where it floats upwards to where all good policemen go at the last whistle, and he tosses the black cindery soul of Big Jake twisting and cursing down the lift shaft, and a lot further.

"Keep your side of it," he screeches after Big Jake. "Switch on the power."

And him and Belfy slide off to the local to await events.

Well, I'll tell you. They're still waiting. For if Big Jake switched on the power again, it wasn't for the Devil and Belfy he was going to do it. It was for himself. "I kept my side of the deal," says he. "Sure wasn't it the first thing I did to cross the picket line and switch on the power again? But divil a bit the bargain said about who I was to switch it on for." He's sitting down there now running the biggest Crime Syndicate in the Universe and recruiting the Mafia left and right, and he's let it be politely known that if the Devil or Belfy dare show their snouts inside his

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territory, he'll make them rue the day. As for the power lines, he's had those blocked off so tight that not an amp or a watt or a spark of Evil has the chance of escaping without Big Jake knowing about it.

What happened to the two wee fellers? The last I saw of them they were calling the numbers in one of Finula Hegarty's bingo halls, the which she'd gone into in a big way of business, using her da's capital as a starter. Bingo halls, betting shops, the money that girl has been coining would balance the budget if she hadn't got the most expensive tax adviser in the business to keep her from having to pay her supertax. Fourteen and eleven pence she returned as her profits last year, and her bathroom carpet made of Russian sables. You can tell where she'll be going when the time comes. But a fine figure of a woman, there isn't a doubt. The finest. Both the Devil and Belfy had a try squeezing her waist more than once, but not a bit of it would she allow.

"The waist me heroic husband squeezed is sacred forever," she'd say, and that was that. She'd hardly pay their wages, let alone allow them a free squeeze. The last time I spoke to them, they were so sick of her they were talking about going into politics. Come to think of it, and looking at the state of the nation, maybe they already have. ◄

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BOOKS

May Day, 1968: Yesterday, I was rushing to finish a column, already overdue, when I was interrupted by the telephone. I heard the news, no more credible for being not entirely unexpected than was the assassination of Martin Luther King a few weeks earlier. On that earlier occasion, there was the radio to listen to through the night, and by morning I had heard the words often enough to understand that the inevitable *had* occurred: that a man of larger-than-life love, anger, faith and endurance had ceased to endure: that his plans and passions were now and evermore *stopped,* with only framed and dated stop-action records of the past to guide the hundreds of thousands hoping to follow him out of the wilderness of now, into a future whose promise no longer shines so bright.

Yesterday, in my less public incredulity, there was only the telephone to force belief, but after one has said often enough to the shared friends and fellow-losers, *He is dead!* the statement, willy-nilly, gains some meaning—and deadline be damned.

Today, almost convinced, I approach (what I still tend to think of as) "Tony's column" almost-understanding—and later than ever. ("We never seem to communicate except by Special Delivery," he wrote one time, late to answer a query I had been late to send.) But of course there will be no fast-finish now. In a way, I have to learn how to write all over again.

For almost twenty years, every word I have written for publication has been addressed in part at least to Anthony Boucher. These columns, above all, have been done with an awareness of audience so acute he might have been looking over my shoulder as I wrote. (We never did find time to write those letters we both kept promising each other: these last few years—he was not well, and I was travelling—we had almost no correspondence. But there was at least this quasi-monthly "letter home," to try to show that I was working, learning, that I *cared.*)

I think most writers have some such single-person audience, one ideally-understanding-and-ultimately-critical reader—a teacher, fellow writer, editor, friend, to whom specifically they address

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themselves. Now (as soon as complete conviction comes—right now I still feel Tony up behind my shoulder—probably snickering some at my refusal to look around and notice him and stop this morbid mawkishness) I suppose I shall have to learn to write broadcast.

Well, for this time at least it will be more like a collaboration. It is an appropriate one for the purpose: the column I was working on yesterday borrowed its theme from an extraordinary book, DYNAMICS OF CHANGE (of which more below); perhaps the dynamic will be seen more clearly by going a bit farther back to look at it.

For some time after his retirement from *F&SF*, Tony continued to do an occasional s-f review column for the *Times Book Review*, and an annual review of publications for my YEAR'S BEST SF anthologies. His review of 1962, in the 7th Annual—about the time his column stopped appearing in the *Times*—began:

"I have been trying for some time to discover why I, as a reviewer, am so much more resentful of uninspired routine books in science fiction than I am of similar publications in the mystery-suspense field. . . .

"I see now that it is because s-f is a form which, more than almost any other, by its very nature demands creative originality. The detective story and even the more modern psychological crime novel are—like the western, the love story, the historical romance—fixed forms, in which the creative challenge lies largely in seeing what the author can do within established boundaries. S-f is—or perhaps better, should and must be—a literature of stimulus and fresh horizons.

"Put it this way: You are not going to complain if a large number of sonnets sound, superficially, a good deal alike; you are fascinated by what each poet manages to do within the sonnet. But if all the free verse you read, from countless diverse hands, sounds pretty much the same, you are justified in thinking that poetry is in a hell of a state.

"A conventional, competent, uninspired murder novel or western is a perfectly reasonable commercial commodity. Conventional, competent, uninspired s-f has no reason for existing."

There *was* no reason—or at least very little. But nowadays—

Making money may not be a good reason for writing conventional, competent, uninspired s-f, but it is a very potent one. Science fiction is "in": or I should say, "science fiction," because it is the label and not the substance that sells. There is an enormous, and growing, audience of both readers and viewers who will buy anything with the label provided it *is* conventional, competent, and unin-

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spired: provided, that is, that it does not dangerously overstimulate virgin mentalities. Publishers and producers have discovered that they can sell, and sell well, anything with a spacecraft, giant computer, mysterious alien, strange, large, monster, or anything else *sufficiently incredible and incomprehensible* to these spinster imaginations. And the producers and publishers are now prepared to pay, and pay well, those authors who can wrap up sci-fi idioms and images in glossy packages guaranteed to blow no minds.

In 1952, Boucher (who was first president of the Mystery Writers of America, and an ardent supporter of the early abortive efforts to establish the SFWA) said in his article in Bretnor's MODERN SCIENCE FICTION, "I know a man who has been turning out a steady 30,000 words a month and selling all of it—the equivalent of five or six book-length novels a year. His annual income from writing has been $3600. There must be some way of being just as poor with less effort." Things were not very much better when he wrote his tirade in the 7th Annual—so it is hardly surprising to find so many of the suddenly big Names of s-f willing to swap their second-class literary and financial citizenship for wall-to-wall installations of Formula Imagination. The surprise, if anything, is that a handful of the established people *still* saw no good reason to stop thinking with their mouths open—and that some of the others (perhaps having caught up on their bills and maybe having had a short holiday) are now backsliding again into intellectual doorbusting, riskily speculative literary ventures, and general imaginative excess.

Whatever the reasons, the Dynamics of Change are clearly in operation, and writers who have been purring along smoothly on their Own Thing tracks, lavishing spit-and-polish on the brassworks of some favorite Fantasticke Engine (or else streaking by so fast in a cloud of technosociogobbldelogical steam that no one could notice there was no engine at all) are suddenly turning up grappling with new raw clumsy genuine home-made *concepts*. Some of them are too big to handle easily, or too balky to handle convincingly. And some of the handlers are a bit out of practice. But it doesn't really matter if they're wrong or right: they're right where they belong. I mean—

Science fiction is not *science*: its job is not getting the answers, but asking the questions. It doesn't have to turn out to be "right"—just turn up what's wrong"; and, maybe most of all, question the meaning of both words. (". . . if it has a more serious function, it is less that of pin-pointed prophecy than that of creating in its readers a climate of acceptance of new wonders

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and a willingness to think at least one step ahead. . . ." From "Science Fiction Still Leads Science Fiction Fact," *N.Y. Times Magazine,* 1957.)

So it's getting better (she said sourly), getting really better all the time.

The way you can tell is the way it's getting worse: I mean the *way* it's getting worse. The Dynamics of Change are more dialectical than Euclidean, and when you get the swing of it, you can almost compute the progress vector by the force of the accompanying reaction blast. Remember—the pubescent child is pimply, clumsy, and gawky, an obvious loser in the Natural Selection biz; the fiercest riots are not in Alabama or Mississippi, but in Newark and Detroit; just before the divorce is when the sweet-talk is stickiest; pollen makes flowers and hay-fever both. *And* if some of the more thoughtful new books are lumpier in texture, uglier in flavor, gloomier in color, or cruder in shape—well, there's lots of the familiar predigested stuff around, if you prefer it.

"You will be required to do wrong no matter where you go. It is the basic condition of life, to be required to violate your own identity."

"We're all someone's tool. That's what society means."

The first quote is from Philip K. Dick's DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP? (Doubleday, $3.95). The second is from Brian W. Aldiss's CRYPTOZOIC (Doubleday, $4.50). Both lines are delivered by sages; both times the protagonist accepts the dictum with a sense of enlightenment and release. Although their speculative contents and story structures are very different, both books seem to me to be concerned fundamentally with the interface between institution and intuition, and any discussion of this duality today is in some respect an investigation into definitions of morality and of sanity. John Brunner's QUICKSAND (Doubleday, $4.50) and Alan E. Nourse's THE MERCY MEN (McKay, $3.95) are less complex books, in which the same duality, essentially, is exposed in—again—two radically different narratives of overt individual madness.

Brunner and Aldiss both conclude with split-level endings: In QUICKSAND, the choice is between "realistic" and "science-fictional" explanations of the ultimate tragedy; in CRYPTOZOIC, the alternatives are simple personal tragedy, or an individual transcendence which will serve in time to mitigate the collective doom of which it is a part. ANDROIDS, like MERCY MEN, has a "happy" ending—for the protagonist, if not the reader. Although Brunner's is the only story set in present time, all four books deal in some depth with

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overlapping aspects of the psychotigenic factors most apparent in contemporary western civilization, particularly as they affect the capacity, and the need, for human communication.

QUICKSAND gives us a psychiatrist working in a mental hospital, maintaining a precarious personality balance in the face of corrosive authoritarian pressures, status-structure stresses, professional and social hypocrisies, and domestic hostility and deceit. When the encapsulated idealism-fantasies which have provided his only internal support are attacked and exposed by a seductively defenseless patient (alien or alienated—the reader is left to take his choice), the disintegration of the doctor's personality is complete.

In an insidiously quiet, indeed quite/rather British/polite manner (very different from Brunner's usual tone) the book poses one vital question after another: Who are the really insane? Who are the controllers, and who the controlled? What do you mean, "freedom"? That sort of thing. But it only poses, never probes—out of politeness, one almost feels, or would, if one had never read Brunner before. The hero, or antihero, is a Mitty without the courage of his own daydreams, a man whose very fantasies are grey-on-grey, and whose fears are a virtual catalogue of neurotica (his mother, society, his boss, an unknown God, his body, and of course his own emotions). A man, in short, grimly over-representative of our culture and, more prototypically than ironically, a psychiatrist: the purblind leading the purblind.

Even this might have made for a fable of power, if the environment from which the little man flees were equally apropos. But I had a bit of the feeling I get when *Playboy* lectures on the New Morality or Betty Friedan on the Feminine Mystique—a sort of displacement-in-time which might be as gently nostalgic as a Jack Finney story if it were less earnest. Women's rights were fought and won many years ago; I know there are millions of women living underprivileged existences today and projecting their frustrations on a delusion of A Man's World—but the battle they have to fight is with their own infant conditioning, not with their husbands. I know there are millions of American boys who persist (in the face of high school pregnancy statistics) in believing that The American Girl must be tricked, lured, or bribed into bed, but the "sexual revolution" of the sixties (as distinct from the twenties) *starts* with full knowledge that sex is popular with women too, and concerns itself more with the varieties of sexual experience than with its outworn proprieties. Brunner's Paul Fidler, similarly, seems to drive himself to his destruction in a Model-A, the victim of an

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early-Freudian culture of the sort in which—I know—millions of people still live, but which, as setting for a contemporary novel, provides little opportunity to do more than peer through keyholes at the most central problems.

Nevertheless, this is one of Brunner's best books to date: solidly constructed, strongly composed, and vividly successful in the effectiveness of those keyhole-glimpses.

Nourse's MERCY MEN is a deceptively simple, action-packed story which approaches many of the same problems from just about every possible opposite direction. The view is from the future, and an ugly one it is, nothing relieved by its moments of utter plausibility. Here, a volunteer subject in a giant research foundation is "cured" (of the trauma earlier induced in him by the same medical-elite powers) by a sort of homeopathic application of carefully controlled dosages of physical and emotional violence, structured falsehood, and personality invasion; the result seems to make him as acceptable to his nightmarishly deranged world as it has become to him. I should like to think that the author's intent was ironic—but his approval or disapproval of the world he has shown is irrelevant beside the fact that so much of *what* he shows has a brutally authentic and convincing ring. In fact, the book is in many ways an illustration of my earlier comments on concepts and crudities: only superficially "conventional," it is certainly *not* "uninspired," and it departs from Nourse's usual pleasant competence in two directions at once: the writing is rougher and the thinking is tougher.

Aldiss's CRYPTOZOIC also concerns itself with power structures on several levels, including the psychiatric and political; but its main speculative preoccupation is with man's orientation in time. The concept presented here is one I do not believe has been treated before in fiction except in miniature, in carefully localized short-term situations in short-length stories. I am not going to try to describe it. Aldiss needs the whole book to depict it; I think I should need one at least twice as long. And any attempt to describe rather than to depict would be doomed: on the rational level, the concept is clear enough—but quite irrational. The book is full of petty inconsistencies and internal contradictions. And yet—

There were moments, over and over, when (in "bellyfeel," not words) I *knew* what he meant. What he has hold of, I think, is a poetic concept so *right* intuitionally that the very attempt at analysis on the surface level of verbal consciousness shatters it unrecognizably. And considering the flaws in

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the rationale the author provides, it does not much matter whether that "rightness" is purely symbolic or prophetically "scientific." What does matter is the excitement, long gone from most of the genre, of snatching at, and sometimes seizing on, a strange, alluring, and frightening avatar of Truth, most maddeningly out of reach in a nonetheless rock-sure sur-reality. (Quick note—no, *no!* I do not mean it is a "surrealist novel"!) Read it.

DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP? does not suffer from any of the assortment of novelistic shortcomings which qualify my admiration for the other three books: Dick has apparently worked his way through to a methodology that gives him much more control, and makes his ideas much more accessible to the reader. In a review of his work some months ago, I compared his techniques to those of the comic strip, and I understand there were readers who took this as denigration. If it seemed so, it was probably because the comic strip itself is simply not a congenial form to me: I don't like the flat bright colors, and stylized images. But I recognize that in this particularity I am stranded almost alone on the far side of a generation gap (with people twice my age, since it is my own generation that first took the comic book to heart)—and it has never stopped me from *reading* (well, some) comics, or from recognizing the value of the form as a message-medium.

In any case, I have read, I think, every one of Dick's books from cover to cover, even when he infuriated, frustrated, or baffled me (as for a while he was doing regularly): at the least there was always the same sort of thing I found in the Aldiss novel—flashes of awareness of a concept entirely outside my own bag, and not successfully communicated, to me, by the author—but clearly worth reaching for, and coming back to.

Whether I have acquired skill at reading Dick, or he has, as it seems to me, begun to organize his material more successfully, this time I experienced none of the jump-frame confusion I have suffered from in the past. This is a rich book, which deals with aspects of the whole range of conflicts, dualities, dichotomies, and interchanges approached in all three of the others described here—and is nothing like any of them. Some of the elements will be familiar to regular readers of Dick's; others are new. This is a world of falling population and sublethal fallout dust, of Wilbur Mercer and the black empathy box, of religious devotion to living animals and merciless extermination of androids, of "specials" and bounty hunters, mood consoles and the inescapable Buster Friendly. Every one of these things is meaningful in context, and the

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context is constructed to contain all the meanings and multiply them.

Perhaps the best thing I can say is that there were still some ideas I'm not sure I know whether I liked, or agreed with, or fully understood —but I assume I will see them from some other angle the next time around.

And I can say with some certainty that the Happy Ending is *supposed* to make you weep.

With which, we come back at last to THE DYNAMICS OF CHANGE (which, of course, has been the topic all along) and to Tony Boucher (who, of course, has been there all the time).

Many years ago, when *F&SF* was new, the Atom Age little older, and the Love Generation not quite old enough to pick its first flowers . . . when there were only about 200,000 s-f readers and perhaps 200 scientists who knew that space travel was just around the solar corner, and a few foresighted young editors at half a dozen publishing houses were beginning to wonder if those 200,000 could get the book habit . . . when the *Reader's Guide* still listed the occasional science fiction piece in its careful lists (mostly from *Colliers*; or by Heinlein in the *Saturday Evening Post*) under the fastidious heading, *pseudo-science* . . . back in that oddly innocent time of two decades gone, there was organized in the Bay Area a group called the Elves', Gnomes' and Little Men's Chowder and Marching Society. Among its early members were Anthony Boucher and a young man named Don Fabun, whom Tony first called to my attention when he became one of the first fairly regular reviewers of s-f on any major newspaper—the *San Francisco Chronical.*

Fabun was also editor, for too short a time, of what I still think was the all-time best s-f "fanzine," *The Rhodomagnetic Digest* (unless you include in the category the, alas!, also defunct *Publication of the Institute of Twenty-First Century Studies*—whose acronym Boucher taught us all how to pronounce). I had heard nothing of Fabun for many years, and had vaguely assumed that like many other bright young fans, he had straightened up, sold his mimeo (actually, RD was offset) and disappeared into the great world of wall-to-wall Reality, when I discovered—via DYNAMICS—that s-f's loss was aluminum's gain, and that Fabun had obviously lost nothing himself in the process.

This extraordinary book* is composed of a series of six articles originally published in the *Kaiser Aluminum News,* of which Don

* THE DYNAMICS OF CHANGE, *edited by Don Fabun, Prentice-Hall for the Kaiser Aluminum Corporation, 1967, $6.95*

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Fabun is editor. In its present form it consists of about 150 (8.5 x 11) pages of text, quotations, charts, and diagrams, and almost 60 more of full-page photographs and art reproductions, mostly in quite unbelievable color, and all of a quality rarely to be found in "art books," and almost never in a "commercial" publication.

It is no more possible to convey adequately the range and quality of this book in a paragraph—or a page—of itemized listings than it would be to represent a Philip Dick novel by an outline of the same length. It is not just the parts, but the larger whole of the sum, and the several ways it adds up, that are significant. The best I can do is suggest the scope by mentioning that among the painters and sculptors included are Tchelitchew, Giacometti, Kienholz (the first photograph of *The Beanery* that has given me an understanding of its fame), Mike Anderson, John Larrecq, Robert Alexander, Ma Yuan, Dali, and Masami Miyamoto. Many of the works were prepared especially for the book and photographed for it by Bob Fraser, Herbert Mattar, Jan Mar, William Jackson, and Robert Isaacs, and they bear about the same relationship to the usual "industrial art" as Ed Emshwiller's industrially commissioned short films do to the usual PR screen job.

The text pages are glossed with short quotations from—at random—Hans Christian Andersen, *Harper's,* John von Neumann, *Sherlock Holmes, What Is Information* by Gilbert W. King of IBM, Associated Press, *Youths and Motorcycles* by Henry S. Stone, Jr., J. Bronowski, *The Tin Woodman Of Oz,* Norbert Wiener, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Loren Eiseley, Lewis Mumford.

The first five sections deal with topics whose headings look familiar (*Telemobility, The Leisure Masses, Automation,* etc.) but whose content keeps *saying* something. The last part, *Foreseeing the Unseeable* would make the book worth getting all by itself: in part because it comprehends and conveys what so many science fiction writers have yet to understand:

"The science of tomorrow or the day after will, unquestionably, outrun the science fiction of today . . . But as creative, imaginative minds keep thinking ahead to the step beyond the next, it is exceedingly unlikely that tomorrow's science will outrun the science fiction of tomorrow. . . .

"What prophet can dare to prophesy the utterance of a prophet yet to come?" *

Tony never said *Goodbye;* he always said *God bless.* When he said it, I always thought it quite possible that God really would.

Goodbye, Tony, God bless.

—JUDITH MERRIL

* *"Science Fiction Still Leads Science Fact"*

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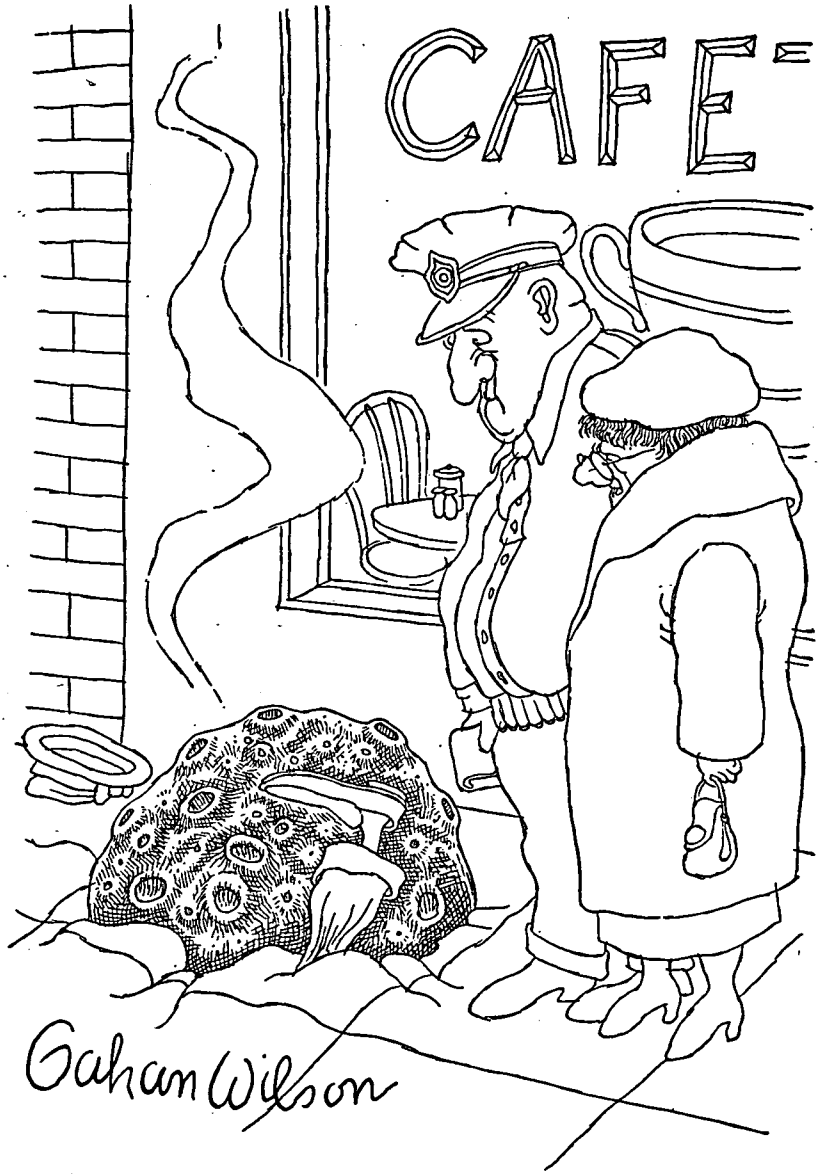

"Funny thing. Eddie was always sure a meteor would get him."

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Here is the second part of Piers Anthony's novel about the building of an empire in a mysteriously structured society that appears to be dominated by combative nomads. The "crazies" are a second element of this society; they know pre-Blast technology and use it to help the nomads. But why? What is behind this oddly divided society? The answer begins to unfold in this section. If you missed part one, the author's synopsis will bring you quickly up to date.

SOS THE ROPE

by Piers Anthony

(SECOND OF THREE PARTS)

SYNOPSIS: In the century following the holocaust an oddly structured society has developed in what remains of America. Armed nomads contest in the battle circle for honor and power. They reside in modern hostels maintained by the Crazies—so called because of their strangely selfless ways. Marriage, for a night or for a decade, is the simple transfer of a bracelet.

Sol the Sword, an excellent warrior and one of the few literate men, meets SOL of all weapons and contests for possession of the name. The latter wins, but returns part of the name in exchange for a year of service by the smarter man. Thus SOS, weaponless but capable and honorable. A woman, SOLA, joins them, taking Sol's bracelet.

It is Sol's ambition to master an empire. The three enter the notorious radioactive badlands in search of a suitable location for a training camp. Sos befriends a bird and names it STUPID. Sol is stung by a poisonous moth and goes into coma. They discover accidentally that Sol has been mutilated: he can never father sons of his own. Ravaging shrews attack, driving them farther into the badlands. Sos carries Sol to safety, but falls in love with Sola.

Sol recovers; they settle on a good campsite and go in quest of empire. First conquered are SAV the Staff, TOR the Sword and TYL of two weapons; others follow rapidly, as Sol is a master warrior. Sos is put in charge of twenty men, whom he takes back to prepare the camp. Sola stays behind when her husband sets forth again, and tempts Sos into an

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affair. Because she does not put aside Sol's bracelet, it is an act of adultery. She is pregnant when Sol returns, but he doesn't object.

Well-trained, the tribe marches. It is victorious everywhere, until a single immense warrior appears: BOG the Club. Bog is unscientific, but so powerful that no one can stand against him. He defeats nine of Sol's best men, and finally Sol himself, to the dismay of his men, takes up a club and walks to the circle.

"THE MASTER!" BOG CRIED, RECognizing him. "Good fight?"

"Good fight," Sol agreed, and stepped inside.

"He didn't even settle terms," Tyl groaned. "This is nothing more than man-to-man."

Sos concurred. In the headlong drive for empire, it seemed a culpable waste to chance Sol in the circle for anything less than a full tribe. Accidents were always possible. But they had already learned that their leader had other things on his mind these days than his empire. Sol proved his manhood by his battle prowess, and he could allow no slightest question there, even in his own mind. He had continued his exercises regularly, keeping his body toned.

Perhaps it took a man without a weapon to appreciate just how deeply the scars of the other kind of deprivation went.

Bog launched into his typical windmill attack, and Sol parried and ducked expertly. Bog was far larger, but Sol was faster and cut off the ferocious arcs before they gained full momentum. He ducked under one swing and caught Bog on the side of the head with the short, precise flick Sos had seen him demonstrate before. The club was not clumsy or slow in Sol's hand.

The giant absorbed the blow and didn't seem to notice. He bashed away without hesitation, smiling. Sol had to back away and dodge cleverly to avoid being driven out of the circle, but Bog followed him without letup.

Sol's strategy was plain. He was conserving his strength, letting the other expend his energies uselessly. Whenever there was an opening, he sneaked his own club in to bruise head, shoulder or stomach, weakening the man further. It was a good policy—except that Bog refused to be weakened. "Good!" he grunted when Sol scored—and swung again.

Half an hour passed while the entire tribe massed around the arena, amazed. They all knew Sol's competence; what they couldn't understand was Bog's indefatigable power. The club was a solid weapon, heavier with every swing, and prolonged exercise with it inevitably weakened the arm, yet Bog never slowed or showed strain. Where did he get such stamina?

Sol had had enough of the wait-

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ing artifice. He took the offense. Now he laid about him with swings like Bog's, actually forcing the bigger man to take defensive measures. It was the first time they had seen it; for all they had known until that point, Bog *had* no defense, since he had never needed it. As it was, he was not good at it, and soon got smashed full force across the side of the neck.

Sos rubbed his own neck with sympathetic pain, seeing the man's hair flop out and spittle fly from his open mouth. The blow should have laid him out for the rest of the day. It didn't. Bog hesitated momentarily, shook his head, then grinned. "Good!" he said—and smote mightily with his own weapon.

Sol was sweating profusely and now took the defensive stance from necessity. Again he fended Bog off with astute maneuvers, while the giant pressed the attack as vigorously as before. Sol had not yet been whacked upon head or torso; his defense was too skilled for the other to penetrate. But neither could he shake his opponent or wear him down.

After another half hour he tried again, with no better effect. Bog seemed to be impervious to physical damage. After that Sol was satisfied to wait.

"What's the record for club-club?" someone asked.

"Thirty four minutes," another replied.

The timer Tor had borrowed from the hostel indicated a hundred and four minutes. "It isn't possible to keep that pace indefinitely," he said.

The shadows lengthened. The contest continued.

Sos, Tyl and Tor huddled with the other advisors. "They're going on until dark!" Tor exclaimed incredulously. "Sol won't quit and Bog doesn't know how."

"We have to break this up before they *both* drop dead," Sos said.

"*How?*"

That was the crux. They were sure neither participant would quit voluntarily, and the end was not in view. Bog's strength seemed boundless, and Sol's determination and skill matched it. Yet the onset of night would multiply the chances for a fatal culmination, which nobody wanted. The battle would have to be stopped.

It was a situation no one had imagined, and they could think of no ethical way to handle it. In the end they decided to stretch the circle code a bit.

The staff squad took the job. A phalanx of them charged into the circle, walling off the combatants and carrying them away. "Draw!" Sav yelled. "Tie! Impasse! Even! No decision!"

Bog stood up, confused.

"Supper!" Sos yelled at him. "Sleep! Women!"

That did it. "Okay!" the monster clubber agreed.

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Sol thought about it, contemplating the extended shadows. "All right," he said at last.

Bog went over to shake hands. "You pretty good, for little guy," he said graciously. "Next time we start in morning, okay? More day."

"Okay!" Sol agreed, and everyone laughed.

That night Sola rubbed liniment into Sol's arms and legs and neck and put him away for a good twelve hours exhaustion. Bog was satisfied with one oversized meal and one sturdy, well-upholstered lass. He disdained medication for his purpling bruises. "Good fight!" he said, contented.

The following day he went his way, leaving behind the warriors he had conquered. "Only for fun!" he explained. "Good, good."

They watched him disappear down the trail, singing tunelessly and flipping his club end over end in the air.

X

"My year is up," Sos said.

"I would have you stay," Sol replied slowly. "You have given good service."

"You have five hundred men and an elite corps of advisors. You don't need me."

Sol looked up, and Sos was shocked to see tears in his eyes. "I do need you," he said. "I have no other friend."

Sos did not know what to say.

Sola joined them, hugely pregnant. Soon she would travel to a crazy hospital for delivery. "Perhaps you have a son," Sos said.

"When you find what you need, come back," Sol told him, accepting the inevitable.

"I will." That was all they could say to each other.

He left the camp that afternoon, traveling east. Day by day the landscape became more familiar as he approached the region of his childhood. He skirted the marked badlands near the coast, wondering what mighty cities had stood where the silent death radiated now, and whether there would ever be such massive assemblages of people again. The books claimed that nothing green had grown in the centers of these encampments, that concrete and asphalt covered the ground between buildings and made the landscape as flat as the surface of a lake, that machines like those the crazies used today had been everywhere, doing everything. Yet all had vanished in the Blast. Why? There were many unanswered questions.

A month of hiking brought him to the school he had attended before beginning his travels as a warrior. Only a year and a half had elapsed, but already it had become an entirely different facet of his existence, one now unfamiliar to him and strange to see again. Still, he knew his way around.

He entered the arched front

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doorway and walked down the familiar-foreign hall to the door at the end marked "Principal." A girl he did not remember sat at the desk. He decided she was a recent graduate, pretty, but very young. "I'd like to see Mr. Jones," he said, pronouncing the obscure name carefully.

"And who is calling?" She stared at Stupid, perched as ever upon his shoulder.

"Sos," he said, then realized that the name would mean nothing here. "A former student. He knows me."

She spoke softly into an intercom and listened for the reply. "Doctor Jones will see you now," she said, and smiled at him as though he were not a ragged-bearded, dirt-encrusted pagan with a mottled bird on his shoulder.

He returned the gesture, appreciating her attention though he knew it was professional, and went on through the inner door.

The principal rose immediately and came around his desk to greet him. "Yes, of course I remember you! Class of '107, and you stayed to practice with the—the sword, wasn't it? What do you call yourself now?"

"Sos." He knew Jones knew it already and was simply offering him the chance to explain the change. He didn't take it immediately, and the principal, experienced in such matters, came to his rescue again.

"Sos. Beautiful thing, that three-letter convention. Wish I knew how it originated. Well, sit down, Sos, and tell me everything. Where did you acquire your pet? That's a genuine mock-sparrow, if I haven't lost my eye for badlands fauna." A very gentle fatherly inflection came into his voice. "You have been poking into dangerous regions, warrior. Are you back to stay?"

"I don't know. I don't think so. I—I don't know where my loyalties lie, now." How rapidly he resumed the mood of adolescence, in this man's presence.

"Can't make up your mind whether you're sane or crazy, eh?" Jones said, and laughed in his harmless way. "I know it's a hard decision. Sometimes I still wish I could chuck it all and take up one of those glamorous weapons and—you didn't kill anybody, I hope?"

"No. Not directly, anyway," he said, thinking of the recalcitrant dagger Nar and Tyl's execution of him. "I only fought a few times, and always for little things. The last time was for my name."

"Ah, I see. No more than that?"

"And perhaps for a woman too."

"Yes. Life isn't always so simple in the simple world, is it? If you care to amplify—"

Sos recounted the entire experience he had had, the emotional barriers overcome at last, while Jones listened sympathetically. "I see," the principal said at the end. "You do have a problem." He cogi-

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tated for a moment—"thought" seemed too simple a word to apply to him—then touched the intercom. "Miss Smith, will you check the file on one 'Sol,' please? S-O-L. Probably last year, no, two years ago, west coast. Thank you."

"Did he go to school?" Sos had never thought of this.

"Not here, certainly. But we have other training schools, and he sounds as though he'd had instruction. Miss Smith will check it out with the computer. There just might be something on the name."

They waited for several minutes, Sos increasingly uncomfortable as he reminded himself that he should have cleaned up before coming here. The crazies had something of a fetish about dirt: they never went long without removing it. Perhaps it was because they tended to stay within their buildings and machines, where aromas could concentrate.

"The girl," he said, filling time, "Miss Smith—is she a student?"

Jones smiled tolerantly. "No longer. I believe she is actually a year older than you are. We can't be certain because she was picked up running wild near one of the radioactive areas a number of years ago, and we never did manage to trace her parentage. She was trained at another unit, but you can be sure there was a change in her—er, etiquette. Underneath, I daresay there is a nomad yet, but she's quite competent."

It was hard to imagine that such a polished product was forest-born, even though he had been through it himself. "Do you really get all your people from—"

"From the real world? Very nearly, Sos. I was a sword-bearer myself, thirty years ago."

"A sworder? You?"

"I'll assume that your astonishment is complimentary. Yes, I fought in the circle. You see—"

"I have it, Dr. Jones," the intercom said. "S.O.L. Would you like me to read it off?"

"Please."

"Sol—adopted code name for mutilated foundling, testes transplant, insulin therapy, comprehensive manual training, discharged from San Francisco orphanage B107. Do you want the details on that, Dr. Jones?"

"No thanks. That will do nicely, Miss Smith." He returned to Sos. "That may not be entirely clear to you. It seems your friend was an orphan. There was some trouble, I remember, about fifteen years ago on the west coast and, well, we had to pick up the pieces. Families wiped out, children tortured—this type of thing will happen occasionally when you're dealing with primitives. Your Sol was castrated at the age of five and left to bleed to death . . . well, he was one of the ones we happened to catch in time. A transplant operation took care of the testosterone, and insulin shock therapy helped eradicate the

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traumatic memories, but—well, there's only so much we can do. Evidently he wasn't suited to intellectual stimulation, as you were, so he received manual instead. From what you have told me, it was exceptionally effective. He seems to have adjusted well."

"Yes." Sos was beginning to understand things about Sol that had baffled him before. Orphaned at a vulnerable age by tribal savagery, he would naturally strive to protect himself most efficiently and to abolish all men and all tribes that might pose a personal threat. Raised in an orphanage, he would seek friendship—and not know how to recognize it or what to do with it. And he would want a family of his own, which he would protect fanatically. How much more precious a child—to the man who could never father one!

Couple this background with a physical dexterity and endurance amounting to genius, and there was —Sol.

"Why do you do all this?" Sos asked. "I mean, building hostels and stocking them, training children, marking off the badlands, projecting television programs. You get no thanks for it. You know what they call you."

"Those who desire nonproductive danger and glory are welcome to it," Jones said. "Some of us prefer to live safer, more useful lives. It's all a matter of temperament, and that can change with age."

"But you could have it all for yourselves! If—if you did not feed and clothe the warriors, they would perish."

"That's good enough reason to continue service, then, don't you think?"

Sos shook his head. "You aren't answering my question."

"I can't answer it. In time you will answer it for yourself. Then perhaps you will join us. Meanwhile, we're always ready to help in whatever capacity we are able."

"How can you help a man who wants a weapon when he has sworn to carry none, and who loves a woman who is pledged to another man?"

Jones smiled again. "Forgive me, Sos, if these problems appear transitory to me. If you look at it objectively, I think you'll see that there *are* alternatives."

"Other women, you mean? I know that 'Miss' you put on your receptionist's name means she is looking for a husband, but I just don't find it in me to be reasonable in quite that way. I was willing to give any girl a fair trial by the bracelet, just as I gave any man fair battle in the circle, but somehow all my preferences have been shaped to Sola's image. And she loves me, too."

"That seems to be the way love is," Jones agreed regretfully. "But if I understand the situation correctly, she will go with you, after her commitment to Sol is finished. I

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would call this a rather mature outlook on her part."

"She *won't* just 'go' with me! She wants a name with prestige, and I don't even carry a weapon."

"Yet she recognized your true importance in the tribe. Are you sure it isn't really your own desire, more than hers? To win a battle-reputation, that is?"

"I'm not sure at all," Sos admitted. His position, once stated openly, sounded much less reasonable than before.

"So it all comes down to the weapon. But you did not swear to quit *all* weapons—only the six standard ones."

"Same thing, isn't it?"

"By no means. There have been hundreds of weapons in the course of Earth's history. We standardized on six for convenience, but we can also provide prototype non-standard items, and if any ever became popular we could negotiate for mass production. For example, you employed the straight sword with basket hilt, patterned after the medieval models, though of superior grade, of course. But there is also the scimitar—the curved blade—and the rapier, for fencing. The rapier doesn't look as impressive as the broadsword, but it is probably a more deadly weapon in confined quarters, such as your battle circle. We could—"

"I gave up the sword in *all* its forms. I don't care to temporize or quibble about definitions."

"I suspected you would feel that way. So you rule out any variation of blade, club or stick?"

"Yes."

"And *we* rule out pistols, blowguns and boomerangs—anything that acts at a distance or employs a motive power other than the arm of the wielder. We allow the bow and arrow for hunting—but that wouldn't be much good in the circle anyway."

"Which pretty well covers the field."

"Oh, no, Sos. Man is more inventive than that, particularly when it comes to modes of destruction. Take the whip, for example—usually thought of as a punitive instrument, but potent as a weapon too. That's a long, fine thong attached to a short handle. It is possible to stand back and slash the shirt off a man's back with mere flicks of the wrist, or to pinion his arm and jerk him off balance, or snap out an eye. Very nasty item, in the experienced hand."

"How does it defend against the smash of the club?"

"Much as the daggers do, I'm afraid. The whipper just has to stay out of the club's way."

"I would like to defend myself as well as to attack." But Sos was gaining confidence that some suitable weapon for him did exist. He had not realized that Jones knew so much about the practical side of life. Wasn't it really for some such miracle he had found his way here?

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"Perhaps we shall have to improvise." Jones tugged a piece of string between his fingers. "A net would be fine defensively, but—" His eyes continued to focus on the string as his expression became intent. "That may well be it!"

"String?"

"The garrote. A length of cord used to strangle a man. Quite effective, I assure you."

"But how would I get close enough to a dagger to strangle him, without getting disembowled? And it still wouldn't stop a sword or club."

"A long enough length of it would. Actually, I am visualizing something more like a chain—flexible, but hard enough to foil a blade and heavy enough to entangle a club. A—a metal rope, perhaps. Good either offensively or defensively, I'm sure."

"A rope." Sos tried to imagine it as a weapon, but failed.

"Or a bola," Jones said, carried away by his line of thought. "Except that you would not be allowed to throw the entire thing, of course. Still, weighted ends—come down to the shop and we'll see what we can work up."

Miss Smith smiled at him again as they passed her, but Sos pretended not to notice. She had a very nice smile, and her hair was set in smooth light waves, but she was nothing like Sola.

That day Sos gained a weapon—but it was five months before he felt proficient enough with it to undertake the trail again.

Miss Smith did not speak to him at the termination, but Jones bid him farewell sadly. "It was good to have you back with us, if only for these few months, Sos. If things don't work out—"

"I don't know," Sos said, still unable to give him a commitment. Stupid chirped.

XI

As he had begun two years before, Sos set out to find his fortune. Then he had become Sol the Sword, not suspecting what his alliteratively chosen name would bring him to; now he was Sos the Rope. Then he had fought in the circle for pleasure and reputation and minor differences; now he fought to perfect his technique. Then he had taken his women as they came; now he dreamed of one.

Yet there were things about the blonde Miss Smith that could have intrigued him, in other circumstances. She was literate, for one thing, and that was something he seldom encountered in the nomad world. True, she was of the crazies' establishment—but she would have left it, had he asked her to; that much had become apparent. He had not asked . . . and now, briefly, he wondered whether he had made a mistake.

He thought of Sola, and that wiped out all other fancies.

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Where was Sol's tribe now? He had no idea. He could only wander until he got word of it, then follow until he caught up, sharpening his skill in that period. He had a weapon now, and with it he meant to win his bride.

The season was early spring, and the leaf buds were just beginning to form. As always at this time of year, the men brought their families to the cabins, not anxious to pitch small tents against the highly variable nights. The young single girls came too, seeking their special conquests. Sos merged with these groups in crowded camaraderie, sleeping on the floor when necessary, declining to share a bunk if it meant parting with his bracelet, and conversing with others on sundry subjects. Sol's tribe? No—no one knew its present whereabouts, though some had heard of it. Big tribe—a thousand warriors, wasn't it? Maybe he should ask one of the masters; they generally kept track of such things.

The second day out Sos engaged in a status match with a sticker. The man had questioned whether a simple length of rope could be seriously considered a weapon, and Sos had offered to demonstrate, in friendly fashion. Curious bystanders gathered around as the two men entered the circle.

Sos's intensive practice had left his body in better condition than ever before. He had thought he had attained his full growth two years before, but the organs and flesh of his body had continued to change, slowly. Indeed, he seemed to be running more and more to muscle, and today he was a flat but solid man of considerable power. He wondered sometimes whether he *had* been touched by radiation and if it could act in this fashion.

He was ready, physically—but it had been a long time since he took the circle with a weapon. His hands became sweaty and he suddenly felt unsure of himself, a stranger in this ring of physical decision. Could he still fight? He had to; all his hopes depended upon this.

His rope was a slender metallic cord twenty-five feet long, capped and weighted at either end. He wore it coiled about his shoulders when traveling, and it weighed several pounds.

Stupid had learned to watch the rope. Sos loosened several feet of it and held a slack loop in one hand as he faced the other man, and Stupid quickly made for a nearby tree. The two sticks glinted as the other attacked, the right beating at his head while the left maintained defensive guard. Sos jumped clear, bounding to the far side of the circle. His nervousness vanished as the action began, and he knew he was all right. His rope shot out as the man advanced again, entangling the offensive wrist. A yank, and the sticker was pulled forward, stumbling.

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Sos jerked expertly, and the cord fell free, just as he had practiced it, and snapped back to his waiting hand. The man was on him again, directing quick blows with both sticks so that a single throw could not interfere with the pair. Sos flipped a central loop over the sticker's neck, ducked under his arm, and leaped for the far side of the ring again. The loop tightened, choking the man and pulling him helplessly backward.

Another jerk and the rope fell free again. Sos could have kept it taut and finished the fight immediately, but he preferred to make a point. He wanted to prove, to others and to himself, that the rope could win in a number of guises—and to discover any weaknesses in it before he had a serious encounter.

The sticker approached more cautiously the third time, keeping one arm high to ward off the snaking rope. The man knew now that the coil was an oddity but no toy; a weapon to be wary of. He jumped in suddenly, thinking to score a blow by surprise—and Sos smacked him blindingly across the forehead with the end.

The man reeled back, grasping the fact of defeat. A red welt appeared just above his eyes, and it was obvious that the rope could have struck an inch lower and done terrible damage, had Sos chosen so. As it was, the sticker had to strike out almost randomly.

Sos let down his guard, looking for a kind way to finish the encounter—and the man happened to connect with a hard rap to the side of the head. The singlestick was no club, but still it could easily knock out a man, and Sos was momentarily shaken. His opponent followed up with the other stick immediately, raining blows upon head and shoulders before Sos could plunge away.

He *had* been away from the circle too long! He should never have eased his own attack. He was fortunate that the other was operating on reflex rather than calculated skill, and had struck without proper aim. He had had his lesson, and he would not forget it.

Sos dodged the sticks until his head was clear, then set about finishing it. He wrapped the rope about the man's legs, lassoing them, and yanked the feet from under. He bent over the sticker, this time hunching his shoulders to absorb the ineffective blows, and pinioned both arms with a second loop. He gripped the coils with both hands strategically placed, lifted, and heaved.

The man came up, hogtied and helpless. Sos whirled him around in a complete arc and let go. The body flew out of the ring and landed on the lawn beyond the gravel. He had not been seriously hurt but was completely humiliated.

The rope had proven itself in combat.

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The following weeks established Sos as a reputable fighter against other weapons as well. His educated rope quickly snared the hand that wielded sword or club, defending by incapacitating the offense, and the throttle-coil kept the flashing hands of the dagger away. Only against the staff did he have serious trouble. The long pole effectively prevented him from looping the hands, since it extended the necessary range for a lasso enormously and tended to tangle his rope and slow down alternate attacks. Wherever he flung, there was the length of rigid metal blocking him. But the staff was mainly a defensive weapon, which gave him time to search out an opening and prevail. He made a mental note, however: never tackle the quarterstaff when in a hurry.

Still there was no positive word on Sol's tribe. It was as though it had disappeared, though he was certain this was not the case. Finally he took the advice offered the first night, and sought the nearest major tribe.

This happened to be the Pit doubles. He was not at all sure that their leader would give information to an isolated warrior merely because he asked for it. The Pit master had a reputation for being surly and secretive. But Sos had no partner to make a doubles challenge for information, and he had met no one he cared to trust his life to in the circle.

He gave a mental shrug and set course for the Pit encampment. He would dodge that weapon when he came to it.

Three days later he met a huge clubber ambling in the opposite direction, tossing his weapon into the air and humming tunelessly. Sos stopped, surprised, but there was no doubt.

It was Bog, the indefatigable swinger who had battered Sol for half a day, for the sheer joy of fighting.

"Bog!" he cried.

The giant stopped, not recognizing him. "Who you?" he demanded, pointing the club.

Sos explained where they had met. "Good fight!" Bog exclaimed, remembering Sol. But he did not know or care where Sol's tribe had gone.

"Why not travel with me?" Sos asked him, thinking of the Pit doubles. To team with such a man—! "I'm looking for Sol. Maybe we can find him together. Maybe another good fight."

"Okay!" Bog agreed heartily. "You come with me."

"But I want to inquire at the Pit's. You're going the wrong way."

Bog did not follow the reasoning. "My way," he said firmly, hefting the club.

Sos could think of only one way to budge him—a dangerous way. "I'll fight you for it. I win, we go my way. Okay?"

"Okay!" he agreed with frighten-

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ing enthusiasm. The prospect of a fight always swayed Bog.

Sos had to backtrack two hours' journey to reach the nearest circle, and by that time it was late afternoon. The giant was eager to do battle, however.

"All right—but we quit at dusk."

"Okay!" And they entered the circle, as people rushed up to witness the entertainment. Some had seen Bog fight before, or heard of him, and others had encountered Sos. There was considerable speculation about the outcome of this unusual match. Most of it consisted of estimates of the number of minutes or seconds it would require for Bog to take the victory.

It was fully as bad as he had feared. Bog blasted away with his club, heedless of obstructions. Sos ducked and weaved and backpedaled, feeling naked without a solid weapon, knowing that sooner or later that ferocious club would catch up to him. Bog didn't seem to realize that his blows hurt his opponents; to him it all was sport.

Sos looped the arm with a quick throw—and Bog swung without change of pace, yanking the rope and Sos after him. The man had incredible power! Sos dropped the garrote over the head and tightened it behind the tremendous neck—and Bog kept swinging, unheeding, the muscles lining that column so powerful that he could not be choked.

The spectators gaped, but Bog was not even aware of them. Sos saw a couple of them touch their necks and knew they were marveling at Bog's invulnerability. Sos gave up the choke and concentrated on Bog's feet, looping them together when he had the chance and yanking. The big man simply stood there, legs spread, balanced by the backlash of his own swings, and caught the taut rope with a smash that ripped the other end from's Sos's hands painfully.

By the time he recovered it, Bog was free, still swinging gleefully. Sos had managed to avoid anything more serious than grazing blows—but these were savage enough. It was only a matter of time, unless he retreated from the circle before getting tagged.

He could not give up! He needed this man's assistance, and he had to ascertain that his weapon was effective against a top warrior as well as the mediocre ones. He decided upon one desperate stratagem.

Sos looped, not Bog's arm, but the club itself, catching it just above the handle. Instead of tightening the coil, however, he let it ride, keeping the rope slack as he ducked under the motion. As he did so, he dropped the rest of the rope to the ground, placed both feet upon it, and shifted his full weight to rest there.

As the club completed its journey, the rope snapped taut. Sos was jerked off his feet by the yank—

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but the club received an equal shock, right at the moment least expected by the wielder. It twisted in Bog's hand as the head flipped over—and flew out of the circle.

Bog stared at the distant weapon open-mouthed. He did not understand what had happened. Sos got to his feet and hefted his rope—but he still wasn't sure he could make the giant concede defeat.

Bog started to go after his club, but halted as he realized that he could not leave the circle without being adjudged the loser. He was baffled.

"Draw!" Sos shouted in a fit of inspiration. "Tie! Food! Quit!"

"Okay!" Bog replied automatically. Then, before the man could figure out what it meant, Sos took his arm in a friendly grasp and guided him out of the arena.

The audience was still gaping.

"It was a draw," Sos told him. "As with Sol. That means nobody won, nobody lost. We're even. So we have to fight together next time. A team."

Bog thought about it. He grinned. "Okay!" He was nothing if not agreeable, once the logic was properly presented.

That night no women happened to be available for a bracelet. Bog looked around the cabin, circled the center column once in perplexity, and finally turned on the television. For the rest of the evening he was absorbed by the silent figures gesticulating there, smiling with pleasure at the occasional cartoons. He was the first person Sos had seen actually watch television for any length of time.

Two days later they found the large Pit tribe. Twin spokesmen came out to meet them. Sos's suspicions had been correct: the master would not even talk to him.

"Very well. I challenge the master to combat in the circle."

"You," the left spokesman said dryly, "and who else?"

"And Bog the Club, here."

"As you wish. You will meet one of our lesser teams first."

"One, two, three a'time!" Bog exclaimed. "Good, good!"

"What my partner means," Sos said smoothly, "is that we will meet your first, second and third teams—consecutively." He put a handsome sneer into his voice. "Then we will sell them back to your master for suitable information. They will not be able to travel, in their condition."

"We shall see," the man said coolly.

The Pit's first team was a pair of swords. The two men were of even height and build, perhaps brothers, and seemed to know each other's location and posture without looking. This was a highly polished team that had fought together for many years, he was sure. A highly dangerous team, better than any he had trained in the badlands camp . . . and he and Bog had never fought together before. As a

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matter of fact, neither of them had fought in any team before, and Bog hardly understood what it was all about.

But Sos was counting on the fact that the rope weapon would be strange to these men—and Bog was Bog. "Now remember," Sos cautioned him, "I'm on *your* side. Don't hit *me*."

"Okay!" Bog agreed, a little dubiously. To him, anything in the circle with him was fair game, and he still wasn't entirely clear on the details of this special arrangement.

The two sworders functioned beautifully. Both were expert. While one slashed, the other parried, and while the first recovered his partner took the offense. Every so often with no apparent signal they lunged together, twin blades swinging with synchronized precision just inches apart.

This, at any rate, was the way it was during the brief practice they engaged in prior to the formal battle. The situation changed somewhat when Bog and Sos took the circle against them.

Bog, turned on by the circle in the usual fashion, blasted away at both opponents simultaneously, while Sos stood back and twirled the end of his rope and watched, only cautioning his partner when Bog began to forget who was on which side. The devastating club knocked both swords aside, then swept back to knock them again, to the consternation of the Pit team. They didn't know what to make of it, and couldn't quite believe that it was happening.

But they were neither cowardly nor stupid. Very soon they split apart, one attempting to engage Bog defensively from the front, while the other edged to the side for an angled cut.

That was when Sos's rope snaked out and caught his wrist. It was the only move Sos made, but it sufficed. Bog smashed them out of opposite sides of the circle, and Sos was right: they were not in fit condition to travel.

The second team consisted of two clubs. A good idea, Sos thought, giving the Pit director due credit, but not good enough. Bog mowed them both down zestfully while Sos continued to stay out of harm's way. The contest was over even more quickly than the first.

The Pit strategist, however, learned from experience. The third team consisted of a staffer and a netter.

Sos knew immediately that it meant trouble. He had only learned of the existence of nonstandard weapons after returning to gain the advice of his mentor, Principal Jones. The very fact that a man had a net and knew how to use it in the circle meant that he had had "crazy" training—and that was dangerous.

It was. The moment the four were in the circle, the netter made his cast—and Bog was hopelessly

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entangled. He tried to swing, but the pliant nylon strands held him in. He tried to punch the net away, but did not know how. Meanwhile, the netter drew the fine but exceedingly strong mesh closer and closer about him, until Bog tripped and crashed to the ground, a giant cocoon.

All this time Sos was trying savagely to reach and help his partner —but the staff held him at bay. The man made no aggressive moves; he only blocked Sos off, and at that simple task he was most effective. The staffer never looked behind him, having full confidence in his partner, and so long as he concentrated on Sos and refused to be drawn out, Sos could not hurt him.

The netter finished his job of wrapping and began rolling the hapless Bog out of the circle, net and all. Sos could guess what was coming next: the netter, deprived of his own weapon, would grab for the rope, taking whatever punishment was necessary to get a grip on it. Then he would keep pulling while his partner took the offensive. All the netter needed was an opening for that first handful—and there would inevitably be an opening, with the staffer's distractions and two men against one. The netter would naturally be good with his bare hands on anything flexible.

"Roll, Bog, roll!" Sos shouted. "Back in the circle! Roll!"

For once in his life Bog understood immediately. His wrapped body flexed like a huge grub, then countered the netter's efforts to manipulate him over the rim. Bog was a hefty chunk of man and could hardly be moved against his will. Bog grunted, the staffer looked—and that was his mistake.

Sos's rope whipped around the man's neck and brought him down choking, while the Pit spectators groaned. Sos hurdled his hunching body and landed on the back of the straining netter. He clasped the man in his arms, picked him up and threw him down on top of his rising partner. A quick series of loops, and both men were bound together, the staff crosswise between them.

Sos did not foolishly approach them again. They could still maneuver together or grab him and hang on. Instead he bent to the net, searching out the convolutions and ripping them away from Bog's body. "Lie still!" he yelled in Bog's ear as the cocoon continued to struggle. "It's me! Sos!"

Untended, the two Pit men rapidly fought free. Now they had possession of both staff and rope, while only Bog's legs were loose from the complicated, tenacious net. Sos had lost his play for time.

"Roll, Bog, roll!" he shouted again, and gave his partner a vigorous urge in the right direction. Bog kicked his legs and tried, but the motion was clumsy. The two

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opponents hurdled him easily—and were caught at waist height by Sos's flying tackle.

All four men landed in a heap, entangled by rope and net. But the net was spoken for while the rope was loose. Sos quickly wrapped it around all three other men and knotted it securely about the striving bundle. Bog, finding the netter similarly bound, grinned through the mesh and heaved his bulk about, trying to crush the man.

Sos extracted the staff and aimed its blunt tip at the head of its owner. "Stop!" the Pit spokesman cried. "We yield! We yield!"

Sos smiled. He had not really intended to deliver such an unfair blow.

"Tomorrow the Pits will speak with you," the spokesman said, no longer so distant. He watched the three men work their way out of the involuntary embrace. "Our hospitality, tonight."

It was good hospitality. After a full meal, Sos and Bog retired to the nearest hostel, which the Pit tribe had vacated for their use. Two pretty girls showed up to claim their bracelets. "Not for me," Sos said, thinking of Sola. "No offense."

"I take both!" Bog cried. Sos left him to his pleasures; it was the rope's turn to watch television.

In the morning Sos learned why the Pits were so secretive about their persons—and why they had formed the doubles tribe. They were Siamese twins: two men joined together by a supple band of flesh at the waist. Both wore swords, and Sos was certain that their teamwork, when they fought, was unexcelled.

"Yes, we know of Sol's tribe," the left one said. "Tribes, rather. Two months ago he split his group into ten subtribes of a hundred warriors each, and they are roving about the country, expanding again. One of them is coming to meet us in the circle soon."

"Oh? Who governs it?"

"Tor the Sword. He is reputed to be an able leader."

"So I can believe."

"May we inquire your business with Sol? If you seek to join a tribe yourself, we can offer you and your partner an advantageous situation—"

Sos politely declined. "My business is of a private nature. But I am sure Bog will be happy to remain for a few days by himself to give your teams practice, so long as your men, women and food hold out. . . ."

XII

"Is this the tribe of Sol of all weapons?" Sos inquired. He had not waited for the arrival of Tor's subtribe at the Pit camp, much as he would have enjoyed being on hand for the contest of wits between Tor and the perceptive Pit strategist. It would probably be a

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standoff. It was Sol he was after, and now that he knew where to find him no delay was tolerable.

As it happened, he had met Tor on the way, and obtained updating and redirection—but it was hard to believe, even so, that this was the proper camp.

Warriors were practicing everywhere, none of them familiar. Yet this was the only major group in the area, so the directions had not been mistaken. Had he traveled a month only to encounter Sol's conqueror? He hoped not. The camp was well disciplined, but he did not like its atmosphere.

"Speak to Vit the Sword," the nearest man told him.

Sos searched out the main tent and asked for Vit. "Who are you?" the tent guard, a swarthy dagger, demanded, eyeing the bird on his shoulder.

"Step into the circle and I will show you who I am!" Sos said angrily. He had had enough of such bureaucracy.

The guard whistled, and a man detached himself from practice and trotted over. "This intruder wishes to make himself known in the circle," the dagger said contemptuously. "Oblige him."

The man turned to study Sos.

"Mok the Morningstar!" Sos cried.

Mok started. "Sos! You have come back—and Stupid, too! I did not recognize you, in all that muscle!"

"You know this man?" the guard inquired.

"Know him! This is Sos—the man who built this tribe! Sol's friend!"

The guard shrugged indifferently. "Let him prove it the circle."

"You nuts? He doesn't carry a—" Mok paused. "Or *do* you, now?"

Sos had his rope about him, but the man had not recognized it as a weapon. "I do. Come, I'll demonstrate."

"Why not try it against the staff or sticks?" Mok suggested diplomatically. "My weapon is—"

"Is dangerous? You seem to lack faith in my prowess."

"Oh, no," Mok protested, obviously insincere. "But you know how it is with the star. One accident—"

Sos laughed. "You force me to vindicate myself. Come—I'll make a believer out of you."

Mok accompanied him to the circle, ill at ease. "If anything happens—"

"This is my weapon," Sol said, hefting a coil of rope. "If you are afraid to face it, summon a better man."

Several neighboring men chuckled, and Mok had to take the circle. Sos knew the jibe had been unfair; the man had wanted to spare him from possible mutilation. Mok was no coward, and since he was still with the tribe, his skill was sufficient too. But it was important that

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the rope prove itself as a real weapon; men like Mok would not believe in Sos's new status as a warrior otherwise.

Friendship ended in the circle, always. Mok lifted his morningstar and whirled the spiked ball in an overhead spiral. He had to attack, since the weapon could not be used defensively. Sos had never faced the star before, and it was a peculiarly frightening experience. Even the faint tune of air passing the circling spikes was ominous.

Sos backed away, treating the flying ball with utmost respect. He fired a length of rope at it, caught the metal chain, fouled it, and yanked ball, chain and handle out of Mok's hand. Mok stood there staring, as Bog had done before him. The spectators laughed.

"If any of you think you can do better, step inside," Sos invited.

A sticker was quick to accept the challenge—and as quick to fall to the throttle-loop. This time it was Mok who laughed. "Come—you must see Vit now!"

"A group of men continued to stand around the circle, murmuring as Sos left. They had never witnessed such a performance.

"I'm glad you're back," Mok confided as they came up to the tent. "Things aren't the same around here since—" he broke off as they approached the guard.

This time there was no trouble about entry. Mok ushered him into the leader's presence.

"Yes?" Vit was a tall, slender, dour man of middle years who looked familiar. The name, also, jogged an image. Then Sos placed him: the sworder that Dal the Dagger had humiliated, back in the first full-fledged tribal encounter. Times had certainly changed!

"I am Sos the Rope. I have come to talk to Sol."

"By what right?"

Mok started to explain, but Sos had had enough. He knew Vit recognized him and was simply placing difficulties in his way. "By the right of my weapon! Challenge me in the circle before you attempt to balk me!" It was good to be able to assume this posture again; the weapon made all the difference. Sos realized that he was being less than reasonable, and enjoyed the feeling.

Vit merely looked at him. "Are you that rope who disarmed Bog the Club, five weeks ago in the east?"

"I am." Sos was beginning to appreciate why Vit had risen to such a position of power so rapidly: he had complete command of his temper and knew his business. Apparently supremacy in the circle was no longer a requirement for leadership.

"Sol will see you tomorrow."

"Tomorrow!"

"He is absent on business today. Accept our hospitality tonight."

Sol away on business? He did not like the smell of that. Sol

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should have no reason to recruit warriors alone, any more—not with ten tribes to manage, the nucleus of his empire. He could not be inspecting any of those other tribes, either; the nearest was at least a week away.

A woman emerged from a compartment and walked slowly toward them. She was dressed in a breath-takingly snug sarong and wore very long, very black hair.

It was Sola.

Sos started toward her, only to be blocked by Vit. "Eyes off that woman! She belongs to the master!"

Sola looked up and recognized him. "Sos!" she cried, then checked herself. "I know this man," she said formally to Vit. "I will speak to him."

"You will *not* speak to him." Vit stood firmly between them.

Sos gripped his rope, furious, but Sola backed away and retreated into her compartment. Mok tugged his arm, and he controlled himself and wheeled about. Something was certainly wrong, but this was not the moment for action. It would not be wise to betray his former intimacy with Sola.

"All the old stalwarts are gone," Mok said sadly as they emerged. "Tyl, Tor, Sav, Tun—hardly any of the ones we built the badlands camp with are here today."

"What happened to them?" He knew already but wanted more information. The more he saw of this tribe, the less he liked it. *Was* Sol still in control, or had he become a figurehead? Had there been some private treachery to incapacitate him?

"They command the other tribes. Sol trusts no one you did not train. We need you again, Sos. I wish we were back in the badlands, the way it was before."

"Sol seems to trust Vit."

"Not to command. This is Sol's own tribe, and he runs it himself, without advisors. Vit just handles the details."

"Such as keeping Sola penned up?"

"Sol makes him do it. She is allowed to see no one while he is away. Sol would kill Vit if—but I told you, everything is different."

Sos agreed, profoundly disturbed. The camp was efficient, but the men were strangers to him. He recognized no more than half a dozen of the hundred or so he saw. It was a strange pass when the closest companion he could find in Sol's tribe was Mok—whose dealings with him before had always been brief. This was not, in fact, a tribe at all; it was a military camp, of the type he had read about, with a military martinet in charge. The *esprit de corps* he had fostered was gone.

He accepted a small tent on the outskirts, alone, for the night. He was troubled, but still did not want to act until he understood the ramifications of what he had observed.

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Evidently the dour Vit had been put in charge because he followed orders without imagination, and was probably completely trustworthy in that respect. But why the need? Something had gone wrong, and he could not believe that his own absence could account for it. Tor's tribe was hardly like this. What had taken the spirit out of Sol's drive for empire?

A woman came quietly to the tent. "Bracelet?" she inquired, her voice muffled, her face hidden in the dusk.

"No!" he snapped, turning his eyes from the hourglass figure that showed in provocative silhouette against the distant evening fires.

She tugged open the mesh and kneeled to show her face. "Would you shame me, Sos?"

"I asked for no woman," he said, not looking at her. "Go away. No offense."

She did not move. "Greensleeves," she murmured.

His head jerked up. "Sola!"

"It was never your habit to make me wait so long for recognition," she said with wry reproof. "Let me in before someone sees." She scrambled inside and refastened the mesh. "I changed places with the girl assigned, so I think we're safe. But still—"

"What are you doing here? I thought you weren't—"

She stripped and crawled into his bedroll. "You must have been exercising!"

"Not any more."

"Oh, but you have! I never felt such a muscular body."

"I mean we're not lovers any more. If you won't meet me by day, I won't meet you by night."

"Why did you come, then?" she inquired, placing against him a body that had become magnificent. Her pregnancy of the year before had enhanced her physical attributes.

"I came to claim you honorably."

"Claim me, then! No man but you has touched me since we met."

"Tomorrow. Give back his bracelet and take mine, publicly."

"I will," she said. "Now—"

"No!"

She drew back and tried to see his face in the dark. "You mean it."

"I love you. I came for you. But I will have you honorably."

She sighed. "Honor is not quite that simple, Sos." But she got up and began putting on her clothing.

"What has happened here? Where is Sol? Why are you hiding from people?"

"You left us, Sos. That's what happened. You were the heart of us."

"That doesn't make sense. I had to leave. You were having—the baby. *His* son."

"No."

"That was the price of you. I will not pay it again. This time it has to be *my* son, conceived upon *my* bracelet."

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"You don't understand *anything*!" she cried in frustration.

He paused, knowing the mystery to be yet unfathomed. "Did it —die?"

"No! That's not the point. That —oh, you stupid, stupid clubhead! You—" She choked over her own emotion and faced away from him, sobbing.

She was more artful, too, than she had been, he thought. He did not yield. He let her run down, unmoving.

Finally she wiped her face and crawled out of the tent. He was alone.

XIII

Sol was a little leaner, a little more serious, but retained the uncanny grace his coordination provided. "You came!" he exclaimed, grasping Sos's hand in an unusual display of pleasure.

"Yesterday," Sos said, somewhat embarrassed. "I saw Vit, but he wouldn't let me talk to your wife, and I hardly know the others here." How much should he say?

"She should have come to you anyway. Vit knows nothing." He paused reflectively. "We do not get along. She keeps to herself."

So Sol still didn't care about Sola. He had protected her for the sake of the coming heir and no longer even bothered with pretense. But why, then, had he kept her isolated? It had never been Sol's way to be pointlessly selfish.

"I have a weapon now," Sos said. Then, as the other looked at him: "The rope."

"I am glad of it."

There did not seem to be much else to say. Their reunion, like their parting, was an awkward thing.

"Come," Sol said abruptly. "I will show her to you."

Sos followed him into the main tent, uncomfortably off balance. He should have admitted that he *had* talked with Sola, and prevented this spurious introduction. He had come on a matter of honor, yet he was making himself a liar.

Nothing was falling out quite the way he had expected—but the differences were intangible. The subtle wrongnesses were entangling him, as though he had fallen prey in the circle to the net.

They stopped before a homemade crib in a small compartment. Sol leaned down to pick up a chuckling baby. "This is my daughter," he said. "Six months, this week."

Sos stood with one hand on his rope, speechless, gazing at the black-haired infant. A daughter! Somehow that possibility had never occurred to him.

"She will be as beautiful as her mother," Sol said proudly. "See her smile."

"Yes," Sos agreed, feeling every bit as stupid as Sola had called him. The name should not have gone to his bird.

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"Come," Sol repeated. "We will take her for a walk." He hefted the baby upon his shoulder and led the way. Sos followed numbly, realizing that *this* was the female they had come to see, not the mother. If he had only known, or guessed, or allowed himself to hear, last night. . . .

Sola met them at the entrance. "I would come," she said.

Sol sounded annoyed. "Come, then, woman. We only walk."

The little party threaded its way out of the camp and into the nearby forest. It was like old times, when they had journeyed to the badlands—yet so different. What incredible things had grown from the early-coincidence of names!

This was all wrong. He had come to claim the woman he loved, to challenge Sol for her in the circle if he had to, yet he could not get the words out. He loved her and she loved him, and her nominal husband admitted the marriage was futile—but Sos felt like a terrible intruder.

Stupid flew ahead, happy to sport among the forest shadows; or perhaps there were insects there.

This could not go on. "I came for Sola," he said baldly.

Sol did not even hesitate. "Take her." It was as though the woman were not present.

"My bracelet on her wrist," Sos said, wondering whether he had been understood. "My children by her. She shall be Sosa."

"Certainly."

This was beyond credence. "You have no conditions?"

"Only your friendship."

Sos sputtered. "This is not a friendly matter!"

"Why not? I have preserved her only for you."

"You—Vit—?" This elaborate guardianship had been for his, Sos's benefit? "Why—?"

"I would have her take no lesser name," Sol said.

Why not, indeed? There seemed to be no barrier to an amicable changeover—but it was wrong. It couldn't work. He could not put his finger on the flaw, but he knew there was something.

"Give me Soli," Sola said.

Sol handed the baby over. She opened her dress and held Soli to her breast to nurse as they walked.

And that was it. The baby! "Can she leave her mother?" Sos asked.

"No," Sola replied.

"You will not take my daughter," Sol said, raising his voice for the first time.

"No—of course not. But until she is weaned—"

"Until, nothing," Sola said firmly. "She's *my* daughter too. She stays with me."

"Soli is mine!" Sol said with utter conviction. "You, woman—stay or go as you will, wear whose clasp you will—but Soli is mine."

The baby looked up and began to cry. Sol reached over and took the little girl, and she fell content-

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edly silent. Sola made a face but said nothing.

"I make no claim upon your daughter," Sos said carefully. "But if she cannot leave her mother—"

Sol found a fallen tree and sat down upon it, balancing Soli upon his knee. "Sorrow fell upon our camp when you departed. Now you are back, and with your weapon. Govern my tribe, my empire, as you did before. I would have you by my side again."

"But I came to take Sola away with me! She cannot stay here after she exchanges bracelets. It would bring shame upon us both."

"Why?"

"Sosa nursing Sol's child?"

Sol thought about it. "Let her wear my brackelet, then. She will still be yours."

"You would wear the horns?"

Sol jiggled Soli on his knee. He began to hum a tune; then, catching the range, he sang the words in a fine, clear tenor:

From this valley they say you are going
We shall miss your bright eyes and sweet smile
For they say you are taking the sunshine
That brightens our pathway a while.
Come and sit by my—

Sos interrupted him, appalled. "You heard!"

"I heard who my true friend was, when I was in fever and could not move my body or save myself from injury. I heard who carried me when I would have died. If I must wear the horns, these are the horns I would wear, for all to see."

"No!" Sos cried, shocked.

"Only leave me my daughter; the rest is yours."

"Not dishonor!" Yet it seemed late for this protest. "I will not accept dishonor—yours or mine."

"Nor I," Sola said quietly.

"How can there be dishonor between us!" Sol said fervently. "There is only friendship."

They faced each other in silence then, searching for the solution. Sos ran over the alternatives in his mind, again and again, but nothing changed. He could leave—and give up all all his dreams of union with the woman he loved, while she remained with a man she did *not* love, and who cared nothing for her. Or he could stay—and accept the dishonorable liaison that would surely emerge, knowing himself to be unworthy of his position and his weapon.

Or he could fight—for woman *and* honor. Everything or nothing.

Sol met his gaze. He had come to the same conclusion. "Make a circle," he said.

"No!" Sola cried, realizing what was happening. "It is wrong either way!"

"That is why it must be settled in the circle," Sos told her regretfully. "You and your daughter must be together." You *shall* be—either way."

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"I will leave Soli," she said with difficulty. "Do not fight again."

Sol still sat holding the baby, looking very little like the master of an empire. "No—for a mother to leave her child is worse than for the leader to leave his tribe. I did not think of that before, but I know it now."

"But you brought no weapon," she said, trying to stave it off.

Sol ignored her and looked at Sos. "I would not kill you. You may serve me if you wish, and do what you wish—but never again will you bear weapon against me," he finished with some force.

"I would not kill you either. You may keep your weapons and your empire—but child and mother go with me."

And that defined it. If Sol won, Sos would be deprived of any honorable means to advance his case, which would mean that he was helpless. If Sos won, Sol would have to give up the baby, leaving Sola free to go with the rope. The winner would have his desire; the loser, what remained.

What remained, despite the theoretical generosity of the terms, was the mountain. Sos would not remain to adulterate the bracelet Sola wore or return in shame to the crazies' establishment. Sol would spurn his empire, once mastered in combat; that had always been clear. It was not a pretty situation, and the victor would have his sorrows, but it was a fair solution.

"Make the circle," Sol said again.

Sol handed the baby to Sola and peered through the trees. He located a suitable sapling and stripped the branches and leaves by hand. Seeing his intent, Sos proceeded to clear a place on the forest floor to form a roughly level disk of earth the proper size.

They met, standing on opposite sides of the makeshift arena, Sola standing anxiously near. The scene reminded Sos of their first encounter, except for the baby.

Sos now far outweighed his opponent and held a weapon he was sure Sol had never seen before. Sol, on the other hand, held a makeshift implement—but he was the finest warrior ever seen in the area, and the weapon he had fashioned was a staff.

The one thing the rope was weak against.

Had Sol's barrow been available, he might have taken the sword or the club or one of the other standardized instruments of battle, but in his self-reliance he had procured what could be had from nature, and with it, though he could not know it yet, the victory.

"After this we shall be friends," Sol said.

"We shall be friends." And somehow that was more important than all the rest of it.

They stepped into the circle.

The baby cried.

(to be concluded next month)

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Dean Koontz has done several fine stories for F&SF in the past two years. This latest, which is quite unlike any of the others, is about a cold, cold ward with twelve beds, eleven of them filled by old men waiting to die. For all its grimness, it is not basically a story of despair, as you will realize when you meet the occupant of the remaining bed.

THE TWELFTH BED

by Dean R. Koontz

NOW IN THE DARK AND THE SILENCE with the metal nurses whirring and smiling and rolling around, now with everyone gone and everything lonely, now with Death hovering near me and now that I have to face him alone, I have decided to record the whole marvelous affair. I have crayons, pastels, and the art paper they gave each of us. Maybe they will find the art paper, like my voice echoing out of the past and whispering tales to them. Maybe.

I'll have to hide the finished document; the supplies closet would make a fine depository, for there is already a great deal of paper in it, and this will be mistaken for unused stock. The metal nurses can't read, but they always burn all your papers when you die. This would not be safe in my desk. That is part of what makes this place a breathing, snorting Hell—not being able to communicate with the outside world. A man should be able to reach through and see progress and pretty women and children and dogs—and oh so many things. A man should not be bottled like a specimen and shoved away in some forgotten file. Batting my fragile wings against the bottle of my imprisonment, I write.

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In the beginning, there were eleven of us. The ward can hold twelve. We knew that several of our number were very close to death and that new vacancies would open up. It was nice knowing there would be new faces. There were four of us who lived through eight years or more in the place, and we valued new faces, for they were all that made life interesting (crayons, pastels, and checkers being limited in their attractiveness after a number of long, empty months).

Once a real Englishman with fine manners came into the ward. He had been to Africa twice, and he had quite a number of safari experiences to talk about. Many a good hour was passed listening to the tales of cats, lean, well-muscled cats that lurked in the brush with glistening claws and yellow teeth to slash and rip and tear at the unwary. There were stories of strange birds. There were tales of strange temples, exotic rituals, narratives about smooth, dark native women.

But then the Englishman died, spitting blood from his mouth and nostrils.

So it was that new faces brought new ideas, making one feel that life still had something in its dried-out carcass to make you want to live. And like I said, there were always fresh countenances. Libby (his real name was Bertrand Libberhad), Mike, Kyu, and I were the only regulars. Old timers of the first order, veterans. Libby topped me by being a patient for eleven years; my own term was nine years long. Kyu and Mike were the juniors, having put in only eight years each. And the others in the ward were temporary, here for a week, a month, two months, then gone, carted away to be thrust into the raging fires of the Flue and burned into ash. It was good for us veterans that so many of them died; new faces, you know.

Yet it is because of one of these new faces that I am now alone, sitting here in the dark, listening for heavy wings of blackness—alone.

The new face was Gabe Detrick. That wasn't odd, for every face has a name just like Libby and Kyu and Mike. But he was so *young!* He seemed to be no older than thirty. We went to sleep with the twelfth bed empty; when we woke, there was Gabe, a great, naked man not long ago a boy. Some eyeless moment of the night had seen him wheeled in and dumped on the bed like so much fresh meat.

Much speculation ensued as to why a young man should be brought to the Old Folks Without Supporting Children Home. One had to be fifty-five before they came in the night, those lumbering crimson-eyed androids without mouths and with gleaming wire sensor grids for ears, and shot you

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with drug guns and carted you away. But this man on the bed was young—nearly a boy.

When he finally shook off the drugs and came to, silence fell upon the room like the quiet after a giant tree has crashed upon the breast of the earth and now lies solemn and dead.

Every eye fell upon him, even Kyu's blind one.

"Where—"

No one allowed him to finish; everyone scrambled toward him to explain his present predicament. When he finally forced his groggy senses to an understanding, he ranted almost as a mad man would. "I'm only twenty-seven! What the Hell is going on here?" He jumped out of bed, swayed slightly on his feet, and began to pace around the room, searching for an exit. We followed him—the few of us who could walk—like sheep preparing to watch the shepherd kill the wolf.

Eventually, he noticed the dim lines of the flush door and streaked toward it, mouthing everything foul he knew. He pounded on the blue paneling even though word was gotten to him that it would do no good. He pounded and pounded and swore and pounded until the decibels of his uproar reached sufficient quantity to stimulate the "ears" of a passing robot. The automaton rolled through the door and asked if anything were wrong.

"You're damn right something is wrong!" Gabe shouted.

The robot leered at him. Robots actually have no facial expressions comparable to a human being, but they had been assigned expressions by the patients. This one—who we called Doctor Domo—always seemed to be leering. Perhaps it was because his left eye glowed a dimmer red than his right.

"My name is Gabe Detrick. I'm an accountant. Address: 23234-545, Lower Level, Mordecai Street, Ambridge."

There was a familiar crackling that always preceded everything Dr. Domo said, then: "Do you want a bed pan?"

We thought that Gabe was going to smash a fist right into the leering devil's alloy face. Kyu screamed as if it had already happened, and his terror seemed to dissuade Gabe from the act.

"Dinner will be served in—click, clack—two hours," Domo squeaked. "Is that the trouble?"

"I want out!"

"Are you dying?" crackled the metal man.

"I'm only twenty-seven!" He said it like anyone older must be ancient papyrus cracking and flaking and ready to crumble to dust. I think we all disliked him a bit for his tone.

"Do you want a bed pan?" the robot asked again, obviously bewildered. It was programmed to answer seven hundred different questions: *May I have a bed pan, may I have more paper, what's for*

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dinner, I have a pain. But nothing in its tape banks was designed to cope with this particular problem.

Then Gabe *did* do it. He pulled back one powerful hand and let go. Of course the blow never connected. One thing the metal nurse was programmed to do was fend off insane and angry patients. With one jolt from its swiftly extended, double-pronged shocker, the machine knocked him flat on the floor, colder than yesterday's pancakes. And believe me, in here, yesterday's pancakes were cold enough yesterday.

We helped him into bed, Libby and I, and put cold compresses composed of worn out undershirts on his forehead.

"Where—"

Kyu started to explain all over again, but he was hushed.

"Never argue with a robot-nurse. You can't win," Libby said. He knew from experience, from his early years in the ward.

Gabe forced himself to a sitting position. His chin was bruised where he had fallen on it, and it was beginning to blue his face like a dull beard. It certainly wasn't pretty.

"You okay?" Kyu asked.

I kept quiet, for I never have been one to say much about anything at any time. Which reminds me of something Libby always used to say when I wrote my short stories (which the robots burned methodically). He would pucker up his scarred lips, open his wrinkled mouth very, very wide and say, "Boys, old Sam doesn't say much, but he's going to be our Boswell. And he'll do a better job with our collective biographies than that old-time runt ever did for Johnson's!"

Well, maybe Libby was right. Maybe I will chronicle it all. Maybe I have enough time left that I can go back from this last chapter and write all the ones that come before. That is all that is left for me now with everyone gone and the ward cold. Silence prevails, and I cannot stand the silence.

Anyway, for weeks after that, Gabe seemed older than the rest of us, almost like one of the walking dead. He explained to us all about the old man who lived next door to him who had been due to go that night, and how the robots must have gotten the wrong address. We explained there was no grievance board of human beings to take the problem to, that we had never seen a human other than patients since we came into the ward. He pounded on the door, took more pokes at more robots and learned the hard way. With the truth creeping in on him, that he would never go free being a thought constantly in his mind, his spirit faded. He was more depressed than we were. Yet he tried not to let it show, he turned outward with his misfortune and di-

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rected his vigor at us, trying to cheer and pep. He was always sympathetic, more so the longer he lived with us. I remember once:

"Goddamn it you took them! I know you took them! You mamza pig! Thief!"

Hanlin, a new face, was so red that his nose was a mighty volcano preparing to burst, his lips already sputtering white lava. "Brookman, you're a liar. What do you want me to say? What would I want with them, hah? What for would I want your silly toys?"

"I'll carve you up when they bring the knives with to eat! Little mother pieces. Blood all over your lousy face!"

Everyone had turned from his bed to watch the drama unfold. But the fact that Brookman and Hanlin were supposed to be friends kept the significance of the scene from weighing on us immediately.

Gabe was quicker. He vaulted a bed—actually leaped right over it—which proved a great pleasure to the bedridden among us who had too long been confined with doddering old men and had forgotten the agility of youth. He vaulted the damn bed and picked Hanlin and Brookman completely off the floor, one wrinkled old skeleton in each hand. "Shut up, you two! You want some robot comin' in here and shocking you both to death?"

"That lousy kike called me a thief!" Hanlin bellowed. He fought to get away from Gabe, but he couldn't twist enough strength out of his old lemon peel body.

"What's the matter?" Gabe asked, trying to bring some measure of calm to the affair.

"He stole my straws. The Goddamn mamza pig stole—"

"Hold it, Brookie. What straws?"

Brookman got a strange look on his face then, somewhat like a child caught at a dirty game. He was no longer the fighter, every inch the old man. "Man's gotta have somethin'. Somethin' his own, God."

"What straws?" Gabe asked again, uncomprehendingly.

"Been savin' my milk straws. You can make all kinds of things with them. I made a doll. Just sorta a doll like the one Adele and me gave to our Sarah when she was a baby." There were little crystal droplets at the edges of his dark eyes. Several of us turned away, not wanting to see; but the words still came. "Just like little Sarah had. Move its legs and everything, make it jump and swim and everything. And if you pretend, God if you pretend, those paper pipes is anything. They can be people that you talk to and move around; they can be money, each straw a five, a ten, even a thousand dollar bill. They're anything. They're most of all being free and having Adele and Sarah and—"

I had to look back at him, because what he said made me feel

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funny inside. He had his old, brown-spotted hands drawn up in front of his face, the veins standing out in bas-relief. He was shaking.

"You take his straws?" Gabe demanded of Hanlin.

"I—"

"You take them!" That was a scream; Gabe's face was twisted up something awful, his lips drawn back and his teeth bared. He looked like some frantic, wild, hungry animal.

"He hoarded them!" Hanlin barked.

"You took them?"

"Damn kike just hoarding and hoarding—"

Gabe dropped him to the floor, but not easily like he did Brookman. Then he picked him up and dropped him again. "You give them back, you hear?"

"He should share—"

"You give them back or I'll peel your skin off and give him your bones!"

Hanlin gave them back. Gabe spent the better part of that week with Brookman. He saved all his straws for the old man and played games with him. Hanlin died that week; Gabe never even joined in the prayer we said as they carted him out. Not many of the rest of us had our hearts in it, I suspect.

But lest anyone think it was all sad times with Gabe here, let me set the record straight. I said he was unhappy. He was. But he had this special way about him, this special talent to make other people laugh. He always had some trick planned, always something to pull on the robots.

When the clanking, whirring nurses came in to serve breakfast, Gabe would always be up and around. He would follow the humming metal nannies, and when he saw the chance, he would stick a leg out and let them trip over it when they turned around.

They were those robots that roll on one leg, and they were easily upset. He would tumble one, then dash away from the scene so fast that a lightning bolt couldn't have caught him. Then the other robots would come skittering to the aid of their fallen comrade, pick him up, and cluck (every damn time, mind you) what they had been programmed to cluck in such a case: "Nasty, nasty fall. Poor Bruce, poor Bruce."

Then everyone would roar. Gabe had done it again.

We never did know why they called the robots "Bruce"—all of them. But it could have been the quirk of some egotistical design engineer of the same name. Anyhow, we would roar.

"Good one, Gabe!"

"You're great, boy!"

"That'll show em, Gabie!"

And he would grin that silly grin of his, and everything was all right, and the ward was not a ward for a while.

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But the ward was always a ward for him.

He was never happy, not even when he clowned for us.

We did our best to attempt to cheer him, inviting him to participate in our words games; nothing worked.

Gabe was not an old man, and he did not belong. Worst of all, there seemed to be no way out for him.

Then, quite by accident, as the by-product of one long and terrible and ugly night, it seemed a way had been found to fight back at the robots.

It was like this:

It was the middle of the night, dark as bat wings, most of us asleep. We might have remained asleep too, if Libby's pillow had not fallen to the floor. He was muffling his sobs in it, and when it fell, he did not have the strength or the sense of balance to reach over the edge of the high bed and pick it up.

We were shaken from our sleep by sound of his weeping. I don't think I have ever heard a sound like that. Libby wasn't supposed to weep. He had been in for too many years; he was a veteran of it all; frustration should have been flushed from him long ago. Not only that. He had had a rough life too, rough enough to rule out crying. He came from Harlem. White parents in Harlem are one thing you can be sure: poor. He was raised in every degenerated part of New York City. He learned young where to kick to hurt the strange men who tried to tempt or drag him into alleys. He knew first hand about sex when he was thirteen—under a stairway in a tenement with a woman thirty-five. Later, he turned to the sea, worked as a dock hand, shipped the hardest runs, and always seemed to lose his money in a fight or on a dame. He had been and seen and felt too much to cry.

But that night it was Libby, heaving his guts out on the bed.

I too must have cried a bit, for Libby.

It was Gabe who put a first hand on his shoulder. We could see him there in the half-darkness of the ward, sitting on the edge of Libby's bed, a hand on the old man's shoulder. He moved it up and ran it through Libby's hair. "What is it, Lib?"

Libby just cried. In the dark and the closeness and the shadows like birds, we thought he would make his throat bleed if he didn't soon stop.

Gabe just sat there running gray hair through his fingers and massaged Libby's shoulder and said things to soothe him.

"Gabe, oh God, Gabe," Libby said between gasps for air.

"What is it, Lib? Tell me."

"I'm dying, Gabe. Me. It wasn't ever going to happen to me."

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I shuddered. When Libby went, could I be far behind? Did I want to be far behind? We were inseparable. It seemed that if he went, I must die too—shoved into the ovens where they cremated us—side-by-side. God, don't take Lib alone. Please, please, no.

"You're as healthy as a rat, and you'll live to be a hundred and fifty."

"No I won't—" He choked trying to stop tears that moved out of his eyes anyway.

"What's the matter, pain?"

"No. Not yet."

"Then why do you think you're going to die, Lib?"

"I can't piss. Goddamn, Gabe, I can't even—"

We could see him then, lifting the thin, wrinkled body we called Libby, Bertrand Libberhad, lifting it against his young chest and holding it. He was quiet in the darkness for a time, and then he said, "How long?"

"Two days. God, I'm bursting. I tried not to drink, but—"

He seemed to crush Libby to him, as if the old man could gain some strength from the flower of his youth. Then he began a rocking motion like a mother with a babe in her arms. Libby cried softly to him.

"Did you ever have a special girl, Lib?" he asked finally.

We could see the head rising off the young chest—just an inch. "What?"

"A girl. A special girl. One who walked just so and talked like wind scented with strawberries and flooded with warmth. A girl with smooth arms and nice legs."

"Sure," Lib said with not so many tears in his voice. "Sure, I had a girl like that. Boston. She was Italian. Real dark hair and eyes like polished coal. She was gonna marry me once."

"She loved you?"

"Yeah. What a fool I was. I loved her and was too dumb to know. Mistake, huh?"

"We all make them. I had a girl too. Bernadette. Sounds like a fake name, but that was hers. Green eyes."

"Was she pretty, Gabe?"

"Pretty as the first day in spring when you know the snow is gone for good and maybe a robin will build a nest outside your window soon. Real pretty."

"Sorry for you, Gabe."

"And did you ever tie on one helluva drunk, Lib?"

"Yeah." There were tears in his voice again. "Yeah, a few. Once in New York for three days. High as a kite, not knowin' where I was at."

"So did I," Gabe said. "New York too. You could have picked me up and set me down in the middle of a cattle stampede without me ever the wiser."

I think Libby might have laughed then. A funny little laugh that threatened tears and didn't really announce joy.

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"And Lib, did you see much of the world, you're being a seaman?"

"Tokyo, London, Australia for two weeks. I been in every one of the fifty-six states."

"More than I saw."

Then in the wings of the shielding darkness, you could hear it—like phlegm bubbling in his old throat. "But, Gabe, I can't piss."

"You've been in love and been loved, Lib. That's more than a lot of people can say. You've seen almost every corner of the world, and some places in it, you've drunk yourself silly. Don't forget all that."

Then I realized that he was not trying to con the old man into forgetting his sickness. He was trying, instead, to show him that there was a dignity in Death, that he could hold up his withered head and say that life had not been an empty cup, the dry bed of a river.

Libby saw a little of that too, I think.

He said: "But Gabe, I don't want to die."

"No one ever does, Lib. I don't; Sam doesn't."

"It *does* hurt!"

"You said it didn't."

"I never would admit pain."

"How hard have you tried to relieve yourself?"

"I think blood came a little the last time. Oh, Gabe, *blood*. I'm an old man, and I've rotted to pieces here for years and saw no sky and no girls and no newspaper, and now my vitals are bleeding on me and my gut feels like it's gonna up and explode with the pressure."

Gabe pulled out the bed pan potty and sat it on the floor. "Try once more, Lib."

"I don't want to. I might bleed."

"Just for me, Lib. Come on. Maybe you can."

He helped him out of bed, set him on the degrading little chair, knelt besides him. "Try, Lib."

"Oh, Mother of God, Gabe, it hurts!"

"Try. Take it easy. Nice and easy."

The darkness was horrible.

"Gabe, I'm—I can't!" Libby was crying and choking. We heard the potty chair go skidding across the room. The next thing, Gabe was crooning, holding the old man to him there on the hard floor.

"Lib, Lib, Lib."

And Libby only moaned.

"You'll be all right."

"I'll sleep. It'll be just like sleeping."

"That's right. That's all it is—just a sleep, a nap."

Libby shook, his old crumbling paper lungs wheezing. "The robots sleep at night, Gabe. Only they wake up."

There was a sudden change in Gabe's tone. "What do you mean, Lib?"

"They sleep. They charge up, plug themselves in. Ain't that hell, Gabe. They sleep too."

Gabe put the old man back in

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the bed and waddled around the baseboard looking for the nearest outlet. "Damnit, Libby, you won't die. I promise you. There's a way out. If we can blow the fuses, catch all the metal people plugged into useless outlets—"

Several breaths were drawn in.

"Lib, you hear me?" Gabe was crying then. "Lib?"

Libby could never have answered. He was dead, lying lifeless in the heap of old gray linen that covered his sagging mattress. But that seemed to give Gabe more determination than ever. "Anyone have a piece of metal? Any metal?"

We were packrats by habit. Kyu had a fork he had held back one day when they had given him two by accident. I had a length of copper wire I had saved for years. It had held the shipping tag on the bottom of my bed. One day, musty years earlier, I had found it while crawling under the bed to see if a dip in the mattress could be corrected.

He almost got electrocuted doing it, but he managed to blow the fuses, all the current being soaked up by the old bed no one was using—no one living, anyhow—the bed wired to the fork that was stuck in the socket. The night light winked out when the fuses blew.

We all worked together to break down the door. The healthy ones put their backs to it, the invalids cheered them on.

We never counted on the replacement robots who stood essential duties while the main crew recharged. Maybe, in the deepest parts of our minds, we knew it. But there was Libby on the bed and strong Gabe to follow. We easily brushed any such thoughts aside.

Gabe died quickly, I think. At least, that is what I like to think. He went down under the flames from a robo-pistol, charred, smoking. The rest fought madly. I broke my leg and was out of most of the action. Now there are eleven beds vacant, and I am in the twelfth. The darkness is close around and there is nothing to say and no one to say it to.

I think now only to write. I think about Gabe tumbling the clumsy robots; I think about Libby, about Gabe holding him there on the bed as a mother with her babe. And I write. Gabe once told me that someone as old as I forgets most recent events first. I must not forget.

The vacant beds will be filled again, and my story is a good one, better even than those of the Englishman. ◀

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This magazine has not run a film column since the late 1950's, when Hollywood released a barrage of sf movies and Charles Beaumont took on the unenviable job of reviewing them. Somewhere between CURUCU, BEAST OF THE AMAZON and ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET THE SKY MARSHAL OF THE UNIVERSE *Mr. Beaumont ran out of invective and patience and all involved came to realize that there really was nothing to say about these movies. Now —some ten years later—a new science fiction film has been released about which there is a great deal to say; so much, in fact, that we have asked for two different reports on* 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY. *The first is from Nebula award winning author Samuel R. Delany; the second from film-maker (and F&SF cover artist) Ed Emshwiller.**

2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

Directed and produced by ..... **Stanley Kubrick**
Screenplay by ..... **Stanley Kubrick, Arthur C. Clarke**
The Cast includes:
Keir Dullea ..... Bowman
Gary Lockwood ..... Poole
Douglas Rain ..... Hal 9000

REVIEWED BY
SAMUEL R. DELANY

Once past the titles, you see landscapes: muted earth colors, yellows, lots of rock, little vegetation. The feeling is horizontal stasis. Almost every line is as long as the horizon itself. The point of view is immobile.

In the penultimate sequence, you are propelled with fantastic energy through landscapes full of verticals: crags, mesas, canyons, waves and precipices, as rich and violent as the opening ones are serene. Some of the scenes are solarized, some are developed with color replacement techniques that increase the visual violence.

The journey between the two is an odyssey that takes a million or so years. We watch proto-humans begin it with a brilliant sequence in which men/apes learn to distinguish the subjective from the objec-

* *We have reports of other promising sf movies in progress; if you like the idea of regular reviews, please let us know.*

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tive, and so invent tools, first used to gain food, then as weapons against their own kind. At its end a star-child, man-become-something-more-than-man, moves through space inside a translucent amnion, regarding the planet earth. The journey has unexpected twists, goes in many odd directions, is ultimately circular; and great steps of it are bridged in the space between two frames of film.

Kubrick concentrates perhaps two-thirds of his vision on one "moment" of the journey: the incidents up to and including the nine month expedition of the space ship *Discovery* to Jupiter. The ship is seeking, unbeknownst to the two conscious humans on the crew, still another of the possibly-sentient slabs that have stood as guide posts since the beginning of the journey. In this section of film, the images are highly mechanized. People talk to one another, make speeches, listen to orders (and in the un-cut version, one set of orders is run twice verbatim to great ironic effect), and only moments later do we realize that the information content is nil. Machines on the vast cinerama screen, showing jeweled Lunar and trans-Lunar nights, dance, offer themselves to one another, supplicate and entreat each other: in one scene, mechanical hands bear a corpse before an implacable, sperm-shaped space ship whose computer-brain has possibly gone ". . . half crazy over the love of you . . ." Throughout this center section of the movie, Kubrick carefully creates a gravity-less universe; as the film progresses, concepts like *up* and *down* disintegrate under the cinerama medium, until at last a human standing with his head pointing straight at the audience has the same visual weight as another standing "upright" in the same frames. In the un-cut version we were given a long and lyric sequence of Gary Lockwood walking, running, jogging about the walls of a great, circular room. The original length of the scene gave the audience time to make the very difficult translation of their own physical movements into this new space. Now the scene is considerably truncated, and in the viscera (or more accurately, in the dark coils of the middle ear) where the film grabs, the hold is a little looser.

But even with the excised twenty minutes (cut by Kubrick himself after the first blunderings began to come through from critics completely at a loss over what to do with a film so blatantly unconcerned with the nineteenth century problems of human mistakes grown from the passions—rather than the intellect, the spirit, or defects in other sensibilities) the bones are still very much intact.

The problems in interpreting the film do not lie in the visual glut of the closing half hour. With all its complex and exquisite imagery, I think everyone will agree it is a vis-

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ualization of rebirth. The problem throws us back to the ship *Discovery:* what sort of man is being reborn?

Two men and a computer are the three conscious entities that make the voyage. By the time the ship is in Jupiter space, the computer has killed one of the conscious men (and all three of the ones in hibernation), and the survivor has lobotomized the computer. But all three are presented as dehumanized products of a bureaucractic culture where people congratulate one another on how well they can use jargon to avoid saying anything.

When Keir Dullea undergoes transmogrification, is he a hero who is being rewarded for avenging his companion? Is he the murderer who destroyed the only "mind" on the expedition that understood the real purpose of the journey? Or is he a purely mechanical person acting solely under the dictates of the situation, and who bears no moral weight one way or the other? These are the interpretive decisions the audience has to make before it can decide whether it agrees or disagrees with what Kubrick is saying. Whether one agrees or not, the argument is austere and staggering. The pacing (at least in the original) was elegant and stately, and set the viewer up magnificently for the final explosion of light, sound, and imagistic juxtaposition.

The amazing white on white on white scenes in the Orbiting Hilton (cf. the unpainted apartment in Godard's technicolor, cinemascope film *Contempt*) is an incredible visual dare that works. There are myriad little gems like this for the buff. For the rest of us there is an amazing amount of visual excitement. It is not the excitement of fast-cutting. In cinerama, three hours of that and you'd be ready for dramamine and cornea transplants. It is simply that the images and objects are presented with superb visual intelligence: they are exciting to look at, and they are exciting to think about after you have looked at them.

REVIEWED BY
ED EMSHWILLER

When Ed Ferman phoned and asked if I'd write a short review of Stanley Kubrick's movie 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY, I gladly agreed. I had one strong reservation, however. I've maintained ever since I got involved in making films myself that I hated all critics and reviewers, and here I was, agreeing to join the "enemy" ranks. All my complaints about how inadequate and myopic all such reviews are seem to have come home. Now I have the problem of trying, in a few words, to say something about another man's film, something I'm hesitant to do even with my own work.

So, after all the hemming and hawing, let me say I liked the

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movie. I recommend it to people who are interested in cinema, to those who are interested in expanding the variety of their experiences, and to those who are interested in science fiction. But, to all those who go to the movies for ritualistic involvement in a standard adventure story, beware. The film does have one strongly dramatic sequence which is quite effective, but that drama and its resolution is not the basis of the film, merely an episode, and if you are going to savor the picture, you must enjoy other aspects as well. For example, what I would call the second sequence in the picture is a beautifully choreographed passage with just a space ship, a space station, the earth, and the stars. There is no "action" except the docking of the ship to the station. The pace is unhurried, as is true of much of the picture, yet this sequence, with its sweeping, turning movements, makes great kinesthetic use of the big screen in an almost abstract sense, a joy of pure movement. At the same time the viewer is introduced to some of the many exceptionally good "science fiction" sets and special effects. Somehow I was prepared not to like most of the "hardware" but found that most was very good indeed. I expected everything to be too smooth. Happily there are some nice, knobby spaceships. Obviously, a tremendous amount of care and concern for detail went into the making of this film.

But it's in the very area of detail where the picture falls short of its potential for me. There don't seem to be any wrinkles or grease spots on either the people or the machines. I mean this mostly in a figurative sense. I realize the film is stylized, but the manner of conveying "human" touches, even when ironic, seems studied and unreal. I've just spent the past six months making an impressionistic film of Project Apollo and have encountered a lot of bureaucrats and spaceman types. Some I liked and some I didn't, but in all cases they were somehow more textured than their counterparts in "2001."

I should say here that there are virtually no films I see that don't have areas that bother me. This one is no exception. I guess it's my inclination to say, even of good films, "that's nice but I would do it another way," which would be a different film, of course.

An especially interesting aspect of the film for me in that respect is the handling of the final sequences. At one point early in making the film, Kubrick asked me if I would assist in designing that part. I read the script he and Arthur Clarke had written. The problem obviously was to create an overwhelming alien world experience. For various reasons I did not become involved in the project, but I was intensely curious to know how he would solve the problem. As it turned out he did it beautifully, with apparent econ-

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omy of means and with great visceral impact. In this sequence his use of semi-abstractions and image modification (solarization, color replacement, etc.) brings to the big screen techniques which once seemed the province of the avant-garde or experimentalists. (Which prompts me to say that it is encouraging to see the range of cinematic vocabulary being used in commercial movies and television today. True, it's still a relatively small segment of the total output that really uses so called advanced techniques, but it's there and growing rapidly. So is its audience. The net result is that there are more types of films to choose from. The various value systems available are increasing, and this is a healthy thing, I think. Of course, it also means that the cutting edge of the avant-garde is being pushed by an ever-growing sophistication and has to keep moving in new directions to stay in the game.)

So, anyway, let me get on with my response to "2001." I like the fact that Kubrick chose "The Sentinel" by Arthur Clarke to base his science fiction movie on. The result is a good science fiction picture without the usual overemphasis on bug-eyed monsters (however much fun they can be sometimes). I like the sense of scale and journey he got. It is the "biggest" science fiction film yet in theme, execution and actual dimensions, at least as far as I can remember. (I'd like to see again some of the old pictures I only dimly recall, like THINGS TO COME.) I liked it when he implied, disliked it when he explained, which, happily, wasn't often. I liked the way the styles varied for the different episodes, giving the overall structure a variety in character and mood. I was at times unhappy with the dialogue. The picture is strongest in its non-verbal sense (a type of filmmaking that appeals to me) even though its concept is based on a story. I thought his use of sound was good, very effective at times: massed voices in rising crescendo at the sight of the mysterious slabs, lonely breathing in empty space. I liked the open-ended ambiguities of the ending. The film had, for me, a satisfying amount of what Sam Moskowitz calls a "sense of wonder," and a feeling which some good science fiction has for the sensual and mysterious regions surrounding our feeling about machines, time and space. All in all it was a fine experience.

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K. M. O'Donnell (FINAL WAR, *April 1968*) *writes stories that do not lend themselves to one sentence declarative synopses. That he writes these stories so well, with a narrative that could be called gripping, but goes further and does a good deal of worrying and shaking, is a reason for our thinking that he is one of the most interesting new voices in sf.*

DEATH TO THE KEEPER

by K. M. O'Donnell

PIPER: The disastrous consequences of George Stone's live (?) appearance on the INVESTIGATIONS show of October 31 are, of course, very much on my mind at the present time. I can find little excuse or explanation for the catastrophic events which have followed so rapidly upon its heels: the gatherings which the press so helpfully informs us are "riots", the general upheavals in the national "consciousness" and that climactic, if ill-planned, assault upon the person of our Head of State last week. No American more than I, William Piper, deplores these events; no American is more repelled by their implications. It was truly said that we are a land of barbaric impulses; our ancestors were savages and our means consequently dramatic, that is to say, theatrical.

But at the point at which *I*, William Piper, become implicated in these events, implicated to the degree that responsibility is placed upon *my* shoulders, at the point at which I am held responsible for these disasters simply because I permitted the renowned and retired actor George Stone, for private and sentimental reasons, to utilize the format of our INVESTIGATIONS show to act out a dramatic rite which was the product of his sheer lunacy; it is at that point, as I say, that I must disclaim. I disclaim totally.

How was I to know? In the first place, I had not seen or dealt with George Stone for the past 14 years and, following his reputation as it

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curved and ascended through the media, thought him merely to be a talented actor, superbly talented that is to say, whose appearance on our show would function to divert our audience and to educate them well, that joint outcome to which INVESTIGATIONS, from the beginning, was dedicated. In the second place, although I was aware that Stone had gone into a "retirement" somewhere around the time of the assassination, I did not connect the two, nor did I realize that Stone had gone completely insane. If I had, I certainly would have never had him on *my* production, and you can be sure of that.

Piper is not an anarchist. Piper does not believe in sedition. While INVESTIGATIONS, product of my mind and spirit, came into being out of my deepest belief that the Republic had no answers because it was no longer asking questions, the program was always handled in a constructive spirit; and it was not our purpose to bring about that mindless disintegration which, more and more, I see in the web of our country during these troubled days. That is why I feel the network had no right to cancel our presentation summarily, and without even giving us a chance to defend ourselves in the arena of the public spirit.

And the recent remarks of our own President, when he chose to say during a live press conference, which no doubt was witnessed by some seventy millions, that the present national calamity could be ascribed wholly to the irresponsibilities of "self-seeking entrepeneurs who permit the media to be used for any purposes which will sell them sufficient packages of cigarettes," were wholly unfortunate and, to a lesser man, would have been provocative. Not only is Piper no self-seeker, Piper has nothing whatever to do with the sale of cigarettes. We sold spot times to the network; what they did with their commercials was their business. I have not smoked for 17 years, and had no knowledge or concern with what products the network had discussed during our two-minute breaks, being far too busy setting my guests at ease, and preparing to voyage even deeper into the arena of the human heart.

"Self-seeking entrepeneurs" indeed! The very moment the announcement of the thwarted attempt to enter the White House and kill our beloved President was flashed upon the networks, I prepared a statement urging the nation to be calm, and repeating the facts of Stone's insanity. It was I, William Piper, who in the wake of the hurried and inaccurate reports as to the size and true intentions of the invading forces, called a press conference and there offered my services to the Administration in whatever capacity they would have me. Is this the performance of a seditionist?

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But there has been no peace. Ever since Stone's spectacular public plunge some seven weeks ago, ever since his convulsions and death (now, blame *me*; say that I gave him poison) it has been Piper, Piper, Piper. Had Stone lived, the accusation would have gone where it belonged: on his curved, slightly sloping shoulders, and *he* would have had much to answer, crazy or not. But because of his unfortunate demise, everything explodes upon the "entrepeneur" who happened to be merely helpless witness to convulsion. Is this fair?

But it is not the purpose of this introduction to be self-pitying or declamatory. Piper spits at such gestures; Piper transcends them. It is only, as it were, to set the stage for the revelations which follow; such revelations speaking for themselves and which publication will fully and finally rid Piper of this incipient curse. Thanks to the production skill and merchandising genius of Standard Books, Incorporated, I have been assured that this small publication will receive the widest distribution imaginable, being fully covered for foreign rights in all countries of the Western world (that is about all that one can expect) and with a fair chance of subsidiary, that is stage and motion picture rights, being taken up as well. The dissemination of this volume will serve, once and for all, to perish all doubts of Piper's patriotism and, as well, will free him, I am sure, of that threatened business for sedition which is now working itself laboriously (but successfully) through the network of the appellate division. They don't have any kind of case; my lawyer assures me they have no case at all.

Let me explain the background of this.

In the aftermath of that INVESTIGATIONS segment during which George Stone, once a renowned actor, attempted to reenact the assassination of our martyred President and ended by dying before the cameras; in the aftermath of that it was necessary, of course, for his environs to be searched, his personal effects placed under government security, and the whole history of his psychosis, needless to say, to be traced. Because the performance occurred on those very premises where Stone had spent the last years of his tragic life, and due to my own heroic efforts to have these premises secured, government and military authorities were able to make a total inventory at once. Billboards were seized, posters, newspapers, political works, magazines, personal paraphernalia of all kinds, stray bits of food secreted within hidden places of the wall, and so on. Also found was the journal which follows.

This journal, kept by the actor during the week immediately preceding his appearance on the INVESTIGATIONS program proves,

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beyond the shadow of any man's doubt, that the actor was completely insane, that his appearance was plotted with the cunning of the insane for the sole purpose of assaulting the precarious balance of the Republic, and that William Piper and INVESTIGATIONS were, from the start, little more than the instruments through which George Stone plotted insurrection. Why then, you ask, was this journal not immediately released to the public, thereby relieving all innocent parties of responsibility and halting, before they began, so many of these dread events?

There is no answer to that. Our Government refuses to speak. Indeed it has not, to this day, acknowledged the *existence* of such a journal, stating over and again through its mouthpieces that the actor "left no effects."

The Government is monolithic; the Government is imponderable. Nevertheless, and due to these most recent events, the Government, mother of us all, must be protected from itself. A carbon copy of this journal, hidden in the flushbox of Stone's ancient toilet, was found by employees of INVESTIGATIONS during a post-mortem examination of the premises three weeks ago, and immediately placed into Piper's hands. Piper, in turn, hastens to release it to the widest possible audience.

Let me make this clear again: *this journal will prove without shadow of doubt that Stone was insane and perpetrated a massive hoax through the persona of the late President, and that all of us were ignorant and gloomy pawns he moved through the patterns of his destiny.* There is no way to sufficiently emphasize that point. It will recur.

The hasty publication of this journal, with foregoing textual matter by William Piper, has led to disgraceful rumors within and without the publishing field that said journal is spurious, is not the work of George Stone, and was prepared by the staff of William Piper solely to relieve himself of present dangers. Having the courage of my format, I will come to grips with this mendacity forthrightly by acknowledging its existence and by saying that it is scurrilous. How could this journal possibly be spurious? It was found above Stone's own toilet seat. Besides, it exhibits, in every fashion, the well-known and peculiar style of this actor; its idiosyncrasies are his, its convolutions are the creation of no other man. Its authenticity has been certified to by no less than Wanda Miller who, as we all know, lived with the actor during those last terrible years, and was privy to his innermost thought. If *she* says it is the work of Stone, how can we possibly deny?

I therefore present, with no further comment, the journal of

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George Stone. Present difficulties notwithstanding, and with all sympathy for the embattled Administration, I must point out that this should bring, once and for all, an end to this business. How could I possibly have had anything to do with Stone's performance? I was merely the focus, the camera, the static Eye. The vision, the hatred, the pointlessness of all of it was Stone's own, as is the creation of all madmen. "Re-enact and purge national guilt by becoming the form of the martyred President and being killed again!" Yes, indeed! Is such nonsense the product of a sane mind?

And now let it speak for itself.

STONE: Yes, here it is: I have it right here. I wrote it down somewhere and I knew it was in this room. Well, I found the little son of a gun. Right under the newspapers on the floor. I must remember to be more organized. Wanda won't like it if I don't get organized. She's warned me—rightly—many times about this. Live and learn, I say; live and learn. I WILL NOT SCATTER MY SHEETS.

Anyway, I've got it. The whole memory, just as I transcribed it yesterday. Or the day before. July 11, 1959. It is July 11, 1959, in Denver and Stone is acting Lear again.

He—that is, I—am acting him half on history and half on intention, trapped in all the spaces of time, the partitions of hell. Space is fluid around me, shifting as it does, defined only by rows, by heads, by dim walls, by my own tears and tread. Sight darts crosswise. I act Lear as only I, George Stone, the flower of his generation, can, while the cast stands respectfully in the wings like relatives at a baptism, while lights twitch and hands wink.

For I, George Stone, *am* Lear. It is the Gloucester scene and old Earl, my familiar and my destiny, stands behind, playing mutely while I rant. He is fat, he is bald, he is in fact old Alan Jacobs himself, familiar as God, as empty as death . . . but no matter; I am alone. I extract the words carefully, reaching inside to make sure that what they mean is still there; the *burning, the burning.*

". . . I know thee well; thy name is Gloucester;
I shall preach to thee, so listen . . ."
And the burning leaps, the burning leaps.
". . . When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools . . . this a good block;
It were a madness to shoe a troop of horse
With felt; so when I steal upon these sons-in-law,
Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill kill!"
Do you hear me, Jacobs?
"Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!"

I wheel upon the bastard; I take old Earl by the shoulders, and I move to vault him on the sea. He trembles in my grasp, and I feel his false surfaces shake; he gasps and

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groans but no matter for I am beyond his objection: I drag him to the sheer, clear cliff and topple him over, send him shrieking ten stories searching for the ground until he hits with a thud and in an explosion of sawdust, his brains spill free and then, cotton as they are, turn green in the fading light. *So much for Lear.*

Sa, sa, sa, sa. For I can kill; I *can* kill and now, against that wooden sky I scream murder so that they can hear; so that all of them can hear. No more of this magic, I say; no more of these imprecations against the nailed skull: in Lear, no one kills; no one *ever* kills, but *let us have no more magicians.*

Attendants come.

They have detected something in the wings, something they were not supposed to see. Ah, here they are: eight of them in a row, carrying a jacket of mail for my arms, my legs. They are coming for the old King; greet the world. I flee.

From stage center to left I go, nimble as light, stuffed like a porpoise. The spot cannot pin me; oh, boy, I transcend vision itself. *Sa, sa, sa, sa.*

Stone is acting Lear again. In Denver, in the vault of the unborn, in all the Denvers of the skull, in the sun of the city itself while the Keeper walks straight through those who love him. Perpetual Lear; perpetual Stone.

He had such plans, he did, that no one knew what they were. But they would be the terror of the earth.

On the other hand, does this make much sense? All of this is fine for me, fine for Wanda: we know what's going on here, and that Jacobs business in Denver was just terrible (did I kill him?) prefiguring, as it did, so much which followed. But I am no impressionist; not me, not George Stone. Got to get the material in shape *circumspectly;* from one thing to the next, all in its place and at last to end with something meaningful. So let me structure the materials as I structured a role; let me resist that impulse which is simply to implode my own skull; sprinkle this stinking cellar with thoughts and curses. Where is Piper? He promised to be here three days ago. The profligate louse; you can trust him for nothing but this time I have the goods and he'll be here. My reputation. That alone makes it worth it. STONE RETURNS TO PUBLIC LIFE ENACTING HIS OWN CREATION BEFORE YOUR EYES. Yes, that should do it. He loves that. But why isn't he here yet? Oh, Wanda, Wanda; I'll grasp a proper grasp to show you what I think of *you!*

We need an organized journal. Part one, part two, but first, by all means a prospectus. Begin with the beginning:

THE BEGINNING

So. It began like this: it was, for

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me, as if the worst of us had risen to confront and destroy the best; that the blood ran free in heaven because the worst said *they wouldn't take it any more; don't need none of this crap.* It was a shattering, because no body politic can exist forever in two parts. Oh, I had it figured out so elegantly. I had it made.

For me it was like this: it was benefit Friday for the Queens chapter of one league or another; the curtain was scheduled to rise at two, and at one I was comfortably settled in full costume, fully prepared with nothing to do for an hour but sit and get in some serious time on the gin which I had thoughtfully stocked at the beginning of the run. I sat there for a while, drinking like that, and listening to the radio, and after a while the Announcement came through. I shut off the radio and went down the hall, looking for the stage manager.

Oh yes, he had heard it too; he had a television set in his office, and now they had broken into all kinds of programs with the Word. Yes, he believed that it was true; someone like the Keeper was bound to get it one of these days, and besides, every man elected in the even number years ending with 0 since 1860 had died in office. He had known the Keeper wouldn't make it from the start. And it looked how he was right, not that it gave him any pleasure and not, thank God, that he had any idea what was really going on. I left the stage manager.

Back in my own room, whisk close the door, listen some more and came the Second Announcement. The Keeper was dead.

I corked the gin and put it away, put my feet up and began to think the thoughts I have mentioned above, the best and worst and coming together and all of that. They certainly made me feel better, because my legs got numb right away, and I was convinced that if anyone was part of the best, I was. Didn't the notices say so? *Everybody knows Stone.*

After a while, the stage manager came into my room, and said that he had decided to call off the performance. Would I make the announcement? "After all, it's your play," he said. "Nobody else should do it. They'll feel better if they hear it from you."

"Why not just pipe it in and let them go home? Much easier."

"Can't do that. Equity rules, you know. Anytime there's a major change in a performance, a member of the cast has to announce it, from the stage."

"This isn't a change, it's a cancellation."

"Fight it out with Equity. There's no precedent. You do it."

"Can't say I want to."

"Who does?"

So I did it.

Can one explain the barbarity of

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that occasion? The theatre was virtually filled, then, and the news did not seem to have come to the audience; they were all sitting there in a spray of contentment, waiting for the curtain to rise on the eminent George Stone in MISERY LOVES COMPANY (doesn't it?), and there I came as the house lights darkened, to stand before the curtain with the servile tilt of the jester. They quieted, and a spot came on me.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the jester said, "I have an announcement. I am most entirely sorry to say that this performance will be canceled."

That seemed to sit fairly well: a few stirrings but nothing drastic. The jester, pleased with his success, decided, however, that they deserved in the bargain to understand the cancellation (not being caused by the jester's health), and so he hastened to serve them:

"As you might know," he said, "our Keeper has been shot in the Southlands, and it appears that he was killed instantly. While we await official notification, it seems certain in the interim that he is no longer with us. Our new Keeper is already at the helm, of course, and will serve us well."

There was a faint murmur, and the lights began to tremble upward again; the jester looked out into the full eye of the house and noted that they were confronting him.

They were confronting him.

"A most terrible tragedy," he said helpfully, "and I am sure that all of you could be induced to join in a moment of prayer for the departed Keeper."

Not a good ploy. There were no bent heads, no shared mutterings during which the jester could make graceful exit. Instead, they continued to look at him. *And look.*

And the jester had an insight then, in that moment when all of the barriers were down and that ancient and most terrible relation between actor and audience had been established, killers and prey . . . the jester realized that they were staring at him as if *he* were the assassin. If he wasn't, why had he interrupted their revels with such news? What had he done? How long had it taken him and how, then, had he been able to return to this stage so quickly?

Well, he had given the news, hadn't he? He, the perpetrator, had made it known. So, then—

It was a difficult period for the jester, and it lasted several seconds until, by sheer heroic will, he compelled himself to take his handsome, if slightly gnarled, frame off the stage and into the wings. He hardly wanted to do so, of course; what he wanted to do—that is, what *I* wanted to do, what *I* wanted to say—was to confront them in return and have it out, lay it on the line. *Excuse me,* I wanted to say: *excuse me, ladies and gents, but I cannot be held responsible for dras-*

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tic acts committed by lunatics in a distant place. I am, after all, only an actor, an occupation never noted for its ability to perpetrate with originality.

That is what I might have said . . . but, to be sure, I said nothing at all. The moment passed, the confrontation went under the surface to muddle with other things. They rose, and as I watched them—having decided that it would, after all, be a mistake to leave the stage—they left.

And, oh god, I hated them, then. I hated their greedy need for a perpetrator as I hated my own tormented and quivering mind; I despised them and shuddered at how close these had come to evicting some final ghosts. But they were right.

They were right, you see; it was as simple as that, and as deadly. Oh, it took me a long, long time to apprehend that knowledge which they had so easily and effortlessly assimilated. I was the killer. The killer of their Keeper.

You can imagine the effect that it had upon me; it was simply catastrophic. I was appalled. It was appalling. It shocked me to the core of my innocent actor's being.

What happens? I asked myself in the empty theatre, uncapping my bottle of gin; *what is going on, here? We must define some limits and stay within.* Easier methods by far to dispose of a Keeper; quiet strangulation or death by pater; poison in the tonic and leeches in the bed. *This was going too far,* I said. I sat before the media and wept for the whole three days, and shortly thereafter I left MISERY LOVES COMPANY.

I left the play, found myself a proper slut to bed and plan with; and a fortnight after that I came to my present quarters, this reeking, stinking abandoned theatre, once a whorehouse, before that a slaughtering mart. A rich, a muddled history: this building is descending into the very earth of the lower East Side of Manhattan; in two hundred years it will peep shyly through a crown of mud.

But that has nothing to do with me. I lie here content with my notes, with my intentions, and with Wanda; always Wanda. Together, then, we work out my condition, my final plan and the plan becomes fruition through the corpus and instrumentation of William Piper. Ah, Wanda, Wanda; I'll make my skull a packing case for your scents, for my waters. I'll toss you a touch to make the altar jump.

My condition. All of it, *my condition.* For the Keeper's death, too, was an abstraction; it was the final abstraction, and it did what nothing else could have done; sped me gaily to the edge of purpose; found me a proper slut and a proper tune. And now, to be sure, a proper destiny.

For the secret shorn bare is this: *it made everything come together.*

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Without it I was nothing, a child trapped in dim child's games; but with it, *ah with it,* I moved to new plateaus, new insights on the instant. *No one ever killed a King but helped the Fool.* Focused so, with edge and purpose at last, I feel within me wandering, the droning forebears of a massive fate.

So endeth THE BEGINNING. We move forward jauntily now, a fixed smile on our anxious face; the old, worn features turned blissful and unknowing, toward the sun.

So, before the act be done, before Piper and his technicians come to unroll the final implements of purpose, chronologize a little; we explain ourselves. Writing this late at night as I must, I can make little order; the entries flickering in time and space would be the ravings of a madman were I not so sane. Barriers must be smashed in any event; fact and fantasy must be melded together. As the Keeper knew. Wow, did he know!

But one last terror remains in these rooms, then, and that must be this: that when it is all over and when police come for my belongings, find this and turn it upon a fulfilled, grateful world, these notes may be taken as clinical offering; may, indeed, be found by Piper and his troops themselves and disseminated as "culture." Oh, I know your tricks, Piper; I know the corridors of your cravening soul and you will try, you will, to reduce these to pure casenotes, more symptomology. But if this be so, be forewarned, Piper: I will not be a document, I will not be a footnote. Not me, George Stone; *I will purge the national guilt by being the Keeper and plunging, at last, the knife into myself; take that, you bastard, and I'll free you all.*

So, chronologize a little.

My name is George Stone. I am an actor. I am the greatest actor of my time. Read the notices. Look at my Equity card. It checks out.

I know more than that. Thirteen seasons ago, when I was young and full of promise, I acted in repertory theatre on the black and arid coast of Maine . . . a cluster of barely reconverted buildings on some poisoned farmland, a parking lot filled with smashed birds and the scent of oil; those dismal seawinds coming uninvited into all the spaces of the theatre. From this, I learned everything I know about the human condition.

How could I not? Life, you see, is a repertory theatre; each of us playing different roles on different nights, but behind the costume, always the same bland, puzzled face. Oh, we wear our masks of so many hues night after night that the face is never seen: tonight a clown and last night a tragic hero and tomorrow perhaps the amiable businessman of a heavy comedy of manners, and next week . . . off to another barn. But underneath the same sadness, the unalterability: the same, the same, the same.

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And so I know: I know what you wore Thursday and what the stage manager plans for you Monday night; I know while you pace the stage this Saturday, all activity, pipe clenched firmly in your masculine jaws, that crumpled in your dressing room lies the faggot's horror. *I know you.* The power of metaphor is the power to kill. You deceive me not for I know all of your possibilities.

Enough; enough. As always, I move from perception to abstraction, from the hard moment to the soft hour. Oh, I must stick to the subject, *I must stay in the temple, the temple of the Keeper.*

Last night, I became 38.

It was a poor enough birthday for the old monarch. Wanda brought me a cake, Wanda cut a slice and I ate it, Wanda blew out the candles, Wanda gave me congratulations. She too ate some, let me give her a pat and then, reaching, we tumbled to the slats and made our complex version of love; the bloat-king's fingers tangling through her hair. It was not a bad birthday, but it was hardly a good one.

Here it is: I got it down just the way it happened. Word by word. Wanda and I had a talk, after my party, and several matters were discussed freely and frankly:

STONE: Wanda? Seriously, now. What do you think of me?

WANDA: How's that?

STONE: Do you think this idea of mine is crazed, Wanda? A little mad? This matters to me, you being my world and all, you know. Is this a sane conceptualization; my re-enactment?

WANDA: I don't get it.

STONE: You go out of doors, Wanda; these days I never do. You have perspective. You know things. The national guilt is really bad, isn't it? They really need a purge, right? You haven't mislead me into—

WANDA: What do I have to do after all this time to prove to you that I'll never betray you?

STONE: I know; I know. But seclusion under such pressure must lead to difficulties. I am so frightened—

WANDA: You'll simply have to trust me.

STONE: I do; I do. But I'm not a machine. I tell you, I am not merely an actor, I *suffer.*

WANDA: Of course you do.

STONE: You could hardly imagine the reach of my passion were you not living with me. Consider what I have taken upon myself. The burden of a nation. The lost Keeper. All of that.

WANDA: Sure.

STONE: I'm no martyr; my uses are concentrated into the fact of my *humanity.* You do believe in the reality of my quest, don't you? (Anxiously) You share, don't you?

WANDA: Always, George. Anything at all. You really should rest now. You're being overanxious again. Everything will be just fine

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when Piper comes, you can be sure of that.

STONE: (Cunningly) What's in it for you?

WANDA: Huh?

STONE: Surely there's something in it for you, isn't there? A fat contract. Notoriety. A contract for your memoirs. Even if national guilt weren't so terrible, you'd *say* it wouldn't you?

WANDA: I don't know how you can say that of me, George.

STONE: Oh, it's easy; I've lived in the world a long—

WANDA: I'm really insulted that you think so of me. In fact, I think I'm going to bed. Goodnight.

STONE: Wanda—

WANDA: You'll feel better in the morning, George. (Exits)

STONE: She's as guilty as the rest of them.

My little closet drama. Wanda is suspect as well, of course, but happily enough, I do not care; a fine and grotesque mutuality, this: conceived for purposes as limited as they are relevant. And, as always for the jester, things voyage to a conclusion now. Nothing is eternal —not even Wanda's delights—and this will end after all. We have outlived our possibilities, she and I. Perhaps my intentions were misguided. But I needed someone . . . an assistant, we shall say. I shall *always* need someone so terribly. *Piper.*

Wanda is coming in now.

Later: time for metaphysical notation. For I am sick, sick of metaphor; Wanda fed me and combed my poor, tumbling hair and pressed my hands to tell me that Piper was coming tomorrow, tomorrow with equipment and technicians. The broadcast will be tomorrow night. There is no time, then, for constructions; we must go to the heart of the issue. For I will tomorrow kill the Keeper, and the last that can be asked is that you know who I am. *Curse you Piper, but I have my notes.* "He finds the whole concept fascinating, George," she said to me. "Particularly this feeling that the national guilt must be purged. He agrees with you there." I bet he does. Fortunately, Wanda has been intermediary from the first—I will have nothing to do with minor relationships, and everything is worked through her, my bland familiar—and the rich implications of Piper's agreement, viz., national guilt need never be explored. Only exploited.

There is so little left to me. Twenty-four hours from now, then, where will I be, after Piper's machines have wrung me through? I must do it now, now, I must make it clear; *I must somehow trace the origin to the roots, past the trickling brown earth and the green stems into the gnarled, poisoned bases of life themselves, the liquid running thick in them, bubbling and choked like blood.*

I first learned that genocide ex-

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isted in Europe when I was 10. My mother, a husky tart named Miriam —but we won't get into *that,* not here, not ever—told me that I might as well face facts beyond the neighborhood: Jews were being killed in Europe by the millions while she hustled and I froze, and someday, if it and the Jews lasted long enough, I might find myself, some day, interceding for them. This news shook and grieved me for days; I wrote a long one-act play about an abstract, persecuted Jew; obscurely, I felt my mother responsible since, after all, she had broken the news.

But not long after that, I met for the first time two of the participants in my mother's vigorous scenario . . . a mixed pair of Schwartzes, who tenanted and barely ran a gloomy candy shop on a nearby corner, put up a sign in the window announcing that they were members of a refugee organization, displayed scars which, they stated, were caused by beating's administered by the milder bigots, and generally made concrete Miriam's whispered injunction.

I was not moved at all.

I wasn't moved; I didn't give a damn. They were two raddled Jews; they raised prices in the store by a fifth, which was hardly justified by their curiously bland and self-indulgent tales of horror; even the exemplification was drab. The worst things had happened not to them but to people they had *heard of.* So one day, in a capitalistic outpouring of patriotism, I overturned the candy counter directly on Schwartz-pater's thigh, and ran. And I took my business elsewhere.

Was that the first inkling of my condition?

Call the Keeper.

Well, this then: once I took an acting course in a great university: I was 17 and wanted to understand why I was gripped by what has always possessed me. (As my obituaries will remind you, I left the course and the university at the end of the fourth week, but that is not the point. Nor is Miriam's reaction relevant.) The instructor warned us in an early lecture that the act of drama was but this: that it began in the particular and moved toward the general; originating as it did in the passion and moving later to the implications. We listened well; we took notes. *Remember,* he said, *when a role is acted, don't worry about what you mean; think about how you feel. Find an image and work from that. Leave the meaning to the professionals. Just feel, feel.*

Ah, yes. Is there some way I can inform the gentleman that my most stunning roles—moving through the decade of my greatness and culminating in the Lear of Denver, the greatest and least human of all Kings, they called me—emerged from the most intricate, the least applicable convolution? Is there?

Does that inkle to my condition?

I call the Keeper.

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And this too: I took a wife. The year was 1953. Her name was Simone Tarquin. She was a designer in that repertory on the coast of Maine. She was 22, she was accomplished, she was lovely, my darling, in the rocks and curling waters. *How she rose to greet me—*

We met in July; I thought I loved her. She knew (she said) that she loved me in June, in all the springs of her life, and that was good enough for me; quickly, quickly, we chose to marry. I had had no time for women in those twenty-five Struggling Years; there was too much to do and too much to flee, and the conceit of having one of my own, at last, to play with for as long and lavishly as I chose was a pretty, pretty, pretty one. In the fall I had a contract at a university theatre; Simone would undertake graduate design on the other side of the country. So, our maddened lover's plans went like this: she would telegram her resignation and join me in the Midwest to type or file in a reconverted barracks; in the night we would build and fondle until a summons came from the East, saying that our time was up; we had transcended suffering. We might even have a child during the struggling period, just to fill out the picture. That was the way it was; we had it figured out. Ah, God.

I have not said that I was a virgin in those days; so I was, but she was not. Solemn confessions were traded during the premarital experience, and agreed to be of no consequence at all. But we decided to defer consummation; after all, there was no reason to further dishonor her (my thoughts). One Saturday, license in hand, we were married before the cast and crew; we said farewell to them and with noisy enthusiasm went straight to the nearest motel, a gloomy, shabby structure four miles from the barns themselves. We parked the car. We removed our luggage. We checked in. We entered our room. We placed down our luggage. We undressed. We had at one another.

And, yes, I can block the scene; yes, I can dredge through the channels of memory for the perfect, frozen artifact; yes, it is there like a horrid relative, ready for resuscitation on all necessary occasions and sometimes unbidden between. Yes, yes, yes, *it happened this way*:

SIMONE: Well, here we are.
STONE: Yes.
SIMONE: Naked, too.
STONE: Indeed.
SIMONE: So, come here.
STONE: Yes. One second.
SIMONE: What's wrong with you, anyway? You look kind of funny.
STONE: (Opening windows, inhaling deeply, fanning himself and knocking a fist against the wall) Kind of warm in here, wouldn't you say?
SIMONE: Silly. They have air conditioning. (She hugs herself.)
STONE: Probably isn't working.
SIMONE: Anyway, there's plenty

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of air now. Why don't you come here?
STONE: One minute.
SIMONE: What's wrong? You seem kind of cold all of a sudden.
STONE: Nothing is wrong. *Nothing.*
SIMONE: (Showing herself) Don't you like me?
STONE: What a question . . .
SIMONE: (Some unprintable, if not untheatrical gestures) Well?
STONE: Of course I like you. I love you. You look lovely.
SIMONE: So then . . .
STONE: So, I love you.
SIMONE: Why are you lighting that cigarette? Stop it!
STONE: Well, it's already lit, so that's that. Might as well finish it now. Be right with you. (He puffs grotesquely.)
SIMONE: (After a pause) I don't like this, George. What do you think I am, the blushing virgin? I *told* you, I've been around. I'm no teenager and I know what's going on. Now either get that miserable cigarette out or . . .
STONE: (Trying to be cheerful) It's almost done now.
SIMONE: *What's wrong?*
STONE: Don't be dramatic, Simone; I'm the actor here. Nothing's wrong. I love you. I'm just a little warm—I meant to say cold—in here.
SIMONE: Then come here. (More theatrical gestures)
STONE: I'm coming. Coming now. (Disposes of cigarette) See?
SIMONE: Closer.
STONE: Like that?
SIMONE: Not quite. More like *this.* And *this.* And *this.*

At this point, our curtain falls chastely for some moments or hours; the scene behind is as predictible as it is monolithic and dull, but there are limits to this playwright's gift for metaphor, and one has been reached now. Of course, one could do this scene in mask and symbol, showing Simone gripping a large, earless rabbit, but such is too tasteless even for that commedia dell'arte the sensibility likes to play in the vault in that noon of dreams. No, no: better to let the curtain fall. After some period of time—perhaps allowing audiences to think about matters and even to do some experimentation of their own—it rises.

SIMONE: (In a state of some agitation, twisting to her side of the bed, holding the sheets closely around her and looking wildly toward the corners of the room) What's wrong with you? What's wrong with you? What's *wrong?*
STONE: Ah—
SIMONE: Oh boy, do I see it now!
STONE: Ah—
SIMONE: It figured. Goddamn, did it figure!
STONE: (Really speechless; this ingratiating and benevolent presence unable to make connection with his audience for one of the few times on record.) Ah—now, look Simone. Ah, Simone—

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SIMONE: *Actors!* You keep away from me!
STONE: (He can respond to that.) You bet I will.
SIMONE: Are you crazy? What's inside there?
STONE: I don't know. Nothing's inside, all right? Nothing. Is that what you want to hear?
SIMONE: I want to hear nothing from you.
STONE: You won't! You won't, then! But the others will. Everybody will hear of me. I'll fix them. (He is distraught.)
SIMONE: Wow. *Wow!*
STONE: Let's get out of here.
SIMONE: I'll buy that. I'll just *buy* it, friend. That's the ticket.
STONE: Go—ah—go into the bathroom and dress.
SIMONE: Turn your back. (He does so and she exits hurriedly stage left, gathering garments as she goes, exuding a faint mist, tossing various parts of her body.) And I want you ready to leave by the time I come out.
STONE: I'll be ready.
SIMONE: Good; *good* for you.
STONE: I'll be ready; I'll be ready. I'll be so damned ready you never saw anything like it in your whole life, you bitch!

The curtain falls. Or, it does not fall—for somewhere, right now, it is yet open, the actors staggering through the banalities; in all of the rooms of the world, the mind, it goes on right now. You as well as the jester have lived through it all too many times; all have dreamed its horrid possibilities on wedding eves; speak to me not, then of divisions in lives. For as it ends, it yet goes on, leaving nothing more to play: I have no interpretations, nor shade, nor form to all of this, nor perspective against which to place it: it is done but it is undone, for at this moment it is going on, it goes on right now; it goes on . . .

Does that abate my condition?

Call; call the Keeper.

Only this, only this must be said, which is: that I wanted *all* women that night but not this woman, that I wanted all flesh, but not that flesh, that I wanted the mystery but not the outcome, and in touching that flesh—in touching Simone's breasts, those wonderful abstractions which had dazzled and goaded and seized me with groans as their clothed representation glided past me so many times—that when I touched them, I found those breasts tough, resilient, drooping bags empty of mystery and redundant of hope; they were flesh, mere flesh freed of that which entrapped it: say too that I found her arms of stone, her thighs of wood and her lips like clay, mere clay; and pressed against her, holding her like a tumbled doll, I knew that by wanting everything, I had taken nothing; by being possessed of the totality, I had lost the elements; by seeking God, I had lost my soul and that in the dream of all flesh, I had lost my flesh.

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And so, I too had had a dream: I dreamed that in the wanting of the fullness, I had lost the oneness, and that entering the cave of time, I had lost the lamp of self and that the light, all of the light, was one. *Light, light, give him some light, give the old King some bulb of hell.*

But there was more, too: it took me a long time to see that there was something else as well, and in the years to come, I learned; I learned by dint of cunning to enter and haunt their channels; I learned with Wanda how to do it and I did it; I did it with luck and skill (by closing my eyes and making pretty pictures); and now, as I lie with Wanda again and again, I lie, afterward, shaken and empty beside her and wonder how it would have been with Simone. Because the secret was all in the pictures; once you knew how to make the pictures, everything else would fall into place.

Suppose I had done it with her, then; suppose I had found the way and had taken Simone shuddering in our night: *would I then have found a fullness in the oneness, instead of the oneness outside this fullness? Would I? Would I?*

Where are you now, Simone?

Where are you, my darling, absolved, annulled these many years and never to be seen again? I dream you then to be in a cave by the sea or in a paneled kitchen staring absently for the Time; perhaps you have become a dressmaker's doll, but it does not matter; it does not matter for you are gone and gone. *Gone, gone; lost, lost.*

It is done. Could you have saved me, Simone? Could you have rescued me through your flesh, through your wholeness from the noisome spaces of this tenement; the shape of my days, the flow of my disaster? Could I have held you, could I have found salvation in you? Could I?

Could I? What could I have done? *What there was to do I did not; what I did I should not have done.* Is there anything ever done that would make any difference at all? Oh God, sometimes, dear, I think that I cannot bear it any longer; this filthy slut, this horrible life, these raving notes, this pointless re-enactment: oh, the twisted plans and the despair and the rage, I am so sick of it, I am so sick, listening to my tinny, tiny voice reverberating in the chambers of self; my own voice imploring, wheedling, ranting, going to periods of cunning, apologizing, searching, . . . *I cannot bear it anymore.*

Oh God, to live through it again with Piper; to implode with him in the reach of the Eye, and to be done with it, to be no more, no more, no more.

Call the Keeper, I want the Keeper, give me the Keeper. Where is our Keeper? We have lost our Keeper.

Death to the Keeper, death to the Keeper.

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Call the Keeper and give him death. Call the Keeper and give him dread. Let him know; let him know.

Let him know love.

Know love.

Love, love, love.

Death, death, death.

Love, love, love.

Death, death, death.

PIPER: That evening, on the INVESTIGATIONS format, George Stone, representing himself as the image of the fallen Keeper, re-enacted the assassination, thereby seeking to purge his country of "national guilt." The dismal outcome, of course, made necessary the publication of his journal.

I am so sure that his journal establishes beyond controversy the sole responsibility of the actor for the grievous events of today, and the complete victimization of Piper that I will say no more about it; no more; no more. Only one last irony remains: Stone felt that his act would *purge* us of "national guilt."

Purge us? One can only say, from this lamentable aftermath, that the precise opposite was accomplished. The attempt upon the person of the present President was disgraceful, and the ragged shouts of the fanatics, scurrilous as their leadership was damning, should convince us of the opposite. Certainly, there are things which should not be meddled with.

Say I; says Piper: if there is poison on the shelf leave it there; leave it sit, fester, mold for the spaces of eternity; do not touch it for once touched, if the poison runs free, it becomes the communal blood and riots and danger and sedition trials and trouble with the press and loss of great sums of money and then they all go out to get you just like they've been wanting to get you for thirty years but this time they have the chance and so the rotten stinking bastard sons of bitches never give you a moment's peace but Piper doesn't care because Piper has the *truth* and as long as a man tells the truth he will be free—that's what I say to them, the hell with them, the hell with all of you, just get off my back before I get you in real trouble, Piper knows, Piper thinks, Piper functions.

Piper, Piper, Piper, Piper, Piper, Piper

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Robert Taylor writes that he was born just six days after H. G. Wells died and celebrated his 21st birthday on the day Hugo Gernsback died. (Now that's *the way we like to get bio information.) Mr. Taylor is a senior at San Diego State and says that he had been planning to teach but would rather write. We'd rather he wrote too. His first story for F&SF is about the ultimate collection of works of art, and it is a very good story indeed.*

A SENSE OF BEAUTY

by Robert Taylor

SHE WAS DARK AGAINST THE burning white of the bed sheets, but not so dark that her skin didn't glow with a translucent ivory light of its own. The light of the moon was hidden by the heavy curtains drawn across the window, but still her nails glinted like rare bits of pearl. She lay there, breathing softly, almost not at all, washed by a dark and surging sea.

Far outside, the real ocean hurled itself against the cliffs with a ceaseless rhythm, tearing at the land with curling fingers driven by energy stored within the vast, dark deep for over a billion years. If you listened deep enough, you could almost hear the cruel scratching of the billion particles of sand that the waves threw against the cliffs, you could almost hear the solid rock start to crack and tear away from the continent, you could almost hear the whole world start to slide into the sea.

Krrt lay back against the icy white coolness that had become inflamed with their heat and now threatened to burst into fire. He tried to let his mind float into the world of swirling colors and pleasant sounds that lies on the rim of sleep, but something kept throbbing in his head, like an aching hand, that might at any moment break into the clear day of realization.

The alienness of this place ached down upon him, and once again he

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yearned with an unutterable feeling for the tall blocked cities and the ceaseless sands and the great horded reservoirs of water of his home. And then again he ached with another unutterable feeling that he must leave this place and the girl lying softly beside him, not sleeping, but drifting deep on that sea that lies between sleep and waking and touches neither.

He felt the girl's fingers crawl down over his arm like some giant, five-legged insect, and settle about his wrist. She began to press down, massaging softly, quietly moving, as if searching for something.

Something nagged at him, something about the girl. Her eyes seemed somehow too wide open to the world around her. She seemed to notice everything and put it away for future reference. Even when she wasn't looking at you, she seemed to be watching you. She has a will to know, he thought, so intense that it devours everything. All primitives are that way.

He felt his skin prickle as a flowing wind of darkness touched him and left glowing drops of dew behind.

Why, it was almost as if she could see right through him.

The girl's fingers stopped moving. They rested firmly across his wrist. They were soft and warm against his skin.

Far outside, the ocean roared, beating rhythmically like a giant heart. There was the sound of rock scraping against rock, giving up to the sky, and then a splash that was lost deep in angry waves. The continent was a bit smaller now.

The girl stirred, moaning a little. "Kurt?"

The voice shivered in the night, trembling him with an irrational fear. The tension that was blazing inside him began to move his fingers.

"Yes?" Softly in the night, he sensed the thing that was coming, even before he knew what it was.

"Kurt," she said, slipping her fingers away from his wrist, "you're an alien, aren't you?"

Krrt reached over to the night table beside the bed and picked up a cigarette. He inhaled deeply and the tip burst into flame. Lying there in the darkness, he looked up at the invisible ceiling, the still strange fumes swirling around inside him, the strange heat settling pleasantly in his chest. An ocean was breaking over him, for all his seeming ease, and he was afraid that any second he would begin shaking violently.

"I mean," she turned in the darkness to face him, holding herself on one elbow, "you come from another planet, another star system."

He slipped softly out of bed, drawing on a robe, and strode to the window, the night air soft and cool against him. He tore back the curtains to let the moonshine in.

There it was, the moon, so tremendous, so bright, and such a

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strange silver light. And how fast she was moving behind the clouds. But no, he had forgotten again. It was not the moon that was moving, but the clouds.

He remembered how his world's three tiny moons glinted together sometimes in the sky, sparkling the sands with their rays. Oh lord, what an ocean of light this moon would make of the desert! A man might go blind with it.

Far out, the sea was ablaze with moonlight, moving softly.

"How bright the moon is. I've never seen anything so large." Then softly: "How did you know?"

"I don't know. I think I suspected something all along, the way you spoke, the way you walked, the way you touched me. There was something strange about you. You looked at things differently, reacted strangely. The way you blended your idioms was strange. You were almost perfect, but still there was something wrong. I couldn't put my finger on what it was, but I could tell there *was* something wrong. And then I felt your pulse, and it wasn't in the right place, and it was beating too slowly, too strongly."

He turned to look at her, her body silvery white in the moonlight, her eyes and lips glistening wetly. His eyes shifted to the painting above her head, a wild swirl of colors, a replication, but there was no possible way of telling it from the original.

"I think I need a drink."

He hurried off to the kitchen.

It was a tall bottle, silver blue from the liquid inside. He poured it into a glass as molten metal might be poured from a smelter. Sipping it, it was cool inside him. The tension that had been mounting up within his body was suddenly gone, dispersed.

The girl came out of the darkness, a light, transparent robe drawn over her nakedness. Her long black hair fell down around her shoulders and flowed like a river between the small mounds of her breasts. "I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to upset you so."

He turned to her. "Why would you *say* such a thing? It's against all logic to make an accusation like that."

She smiled. "I guess we humans aren't very logical."

"Meaning that I'm not human."

Shock leaped in her face. "Oh, I didn't—"

"But you did, subconsciously. What you should have said is, 'We primitives aren't very logical.' "

She smiled again. "I really am sorry."

He reached behind him and took down another glass. "Here, I suppose it won't hurt anything if you try this. The first person on this planet to taste an alien liquor."

He watched her as softly she raised the glass to her lips and softly let the cool blue lake flow into her warm red mouth. She held it for a

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little while, and then let it flow on down. Her lips began to quiver with disgust, and then suddenly blossomed into a wry smile. "It's so cold."

"You must expect something different. What does it taste like?"

"I can't—strange—I can only think of dark space and blazing suns, a fall of dust on lifeless plains."

"It always makes me think of my home planet, dry air and sands like oceans of jewels, with the naked stars blazing over it all."

He pushed the door open, out into the night upon the terrace above the sea. "Let's go out here a little while."

She followed him out to the small fence that ran along the edge of the terrace where the land dropped away to the sea far below. The waves roared and roared, angry at the land for its existence. Krrt looked down at the phosphorescence burning in the waves, his elbow resting on the top rail of the fence—wood cracked, someone would have to fix it some year—his glass glinting by moonlight in his hands.

"Everything that is alien and beautiful fills the soul with a strange wonder, an immense peace. The ocean, oh, how strange and wonderful is the ocean! Tell me about the ocean."

She leaned close to him, her glass glinting in one hand, her hair flowing like a dark river, blazed with silver by the moonshine. It brushed soft against him, so soft and fuzzy, like the deepest memories of childhood, like the first tendrils of sleep. There was a smell about her, the smell of a primitive people raised on meat and milk, but it wasn't an unpleasant smell; it was merely strange, alien.

She turned to look at him, a strange smile on her lips, a strange glint in her dark-by-moonshine eyes. "The sea," she said, her voice a poem in the night. "The ocean is the mother of all life."

"Is it?"

"Of course." She almost laughed. "You must know *that!*"

"But—" He stood in stunned silence for long seconds, and when at last he spoke, it was in a voice that almost wept. "My world lost its oceans a million years ago. My ancestors were stranded on it twenty-five thousand years ago, after the Exodus from the Center."

"Oh, then you couldn't know. I'm sorry."

"There is nothing can be done now. There are some peoples that would know this, but the talents of mine do not fall that way. Go on."

"What is your people's talent?"

"Appreciating, but do go on."

"What can I say? Dark Mother of all life, it flows even in our blood, beats in our hearts. She is dark and eternal. She beats in our souls, calls us. She will be here when we are gone. She will be here when the sun flames out."

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Krrt took another sip from his glass. He knew what was coming; he felt it as surely as he heard the beating of the ocean. "I suppose there must be something of the ocean still left in my people, however far they are away from the sea that originally gave them birth. There was something in me that made me rent this house here, something besides the loneliness. Perhaps I felt its call."

Above them, the single moon gazed down upon them as it had done upon millions of millions of couples for thousands and thousands of years.

"What was the Exodus from the Center you were talking about?"

"Twenty-five thousand years ago the empire in the central nucleus of the galaxy dissolved in a wave of anarchy and chaos. All those that could, fled out into the night of peace in the Arms, or even beyond into the intergalactic night. Undoubtedly, that was how this world was populated. We are probably distant, distant cousins."

He wanted to speak more, but he couldn't. He wanted to tell her about his planet, but he couldn't. He wanted to tell her about racing boats across the sand while the three moons sparkled high above, but he couldn't. He had suddenly realized that an enormous gulf separated them. She was more primitively emotional than he was. The ocean beat more in her blood than it did in his; she was closer to the source. She dwelt more in nature than he did, and she was controlled more by the cycles of nature.

"How long have you been here?"

"Two years."

"So long? I suppose you're still studying us."

"That, and collecting—" He stopped with his heart in his throat. If he went on, she would surely guess, and for some reason he didn't want her to know.

"Collecting what?"

"Works of art, literature. . . ."

"Of course, studying our culture. When are you going to reveal yourself."

"We don't plan to."

"Why not? If you've gone to all this trouble, you just can't go away. Or have we failed your test? Are we too belligerent? If we are, you could help us."

He wanted to shout at her to be silent, but it was too late. She had gone too far; she would know, willed she or not. When he spoke, it was with the shamed anger of one who knows he is doing wrong.

"Why should we help you! We would leave this planet entirely alone but for one thing."

She drew away. "What?"

He stepped backwards, towards the house. "The life-envelope surrounding it. There's not enough time." He was speaking more to himself than he was to her. Then he turned his eyes full on her. "Within a hundred years, your sun will enter the first stages of novation."

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She drew hard away from him now, a scream working in her eyes.

"You could help us, evacuate us to some other system. There must be something we are useful for. You can't let us die."

"Why not? We're not responsible. The universe is destroying you. It is just as if we never stumbled across you."

"But you *are* here! You can't pretend you're not!"

He stood silent, something dark churning inside him.

"I am not my own master. There are others. . . ."

"What are you doing here then?"

"We are—collecting, works of art, works of literature, to save them from the flames."

"You collect our art, but you leave us here to die? Don't you have any feelings, can't you love anything!"

"As you understand those words, no. I feel only a shade of what you feel, as far as I understand what you feel; but still, the emotions of my people are a thousand times as powerful as the emotions of our masters. My people have a sense of beauty that none of the other peoples of the galaxy possess, and so we are made the art collectors for the galaxy." He laughed sadly. "It's quite a thing to have a work of art selected by one of us, because then you know that it is truly art, and truly beautiful, even if you can't feel it yourself."

He looked at her, sadness, as much as he could feel of it, welling up behind his eyes. "We are the critics of the galaxy, and you primitives are the creators. Your vicarious immortality depends on us. You perish, but your works go on. Someday they will become tired of us, and we will leave nothing behind."

She was looking at him in horror. "Why did you need *me?*"

"Because I am a man, even though I'm from a far away world, and you are beautiful. I appreciate beautiful things."

She backed hard away from him, pushing with all her force at the wooden fence. "You're a monster, that's all."

He held out his arms. "Please, I —"

"No! Stay away from me."

A liquid was flowing from her eyes, glittering like dew on her cheeks.

The ocean rumbled like a giant heart below.

Above, some night bird had lost its way and cried plaintively.

He took a step forward. "Please. You're safe. You have a hundred years, at least. You may be able to save yourselves."

"Get away from me! She spun around to run and threw herself against the fence, startled by its sudden hardness pressing against her. The old wood, exposed for years to hot days and cold nights and the rotting salt air, cracked.

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Slowly a section of it began to fall outwards.

He grabbed one of her hands in his, but with a look of disgust she tore it out of his grasp.

She didn't scream; all the way down, she didn't scream.

The moon caught the spinning glass as it fell like a clear drop of rain all the way down past the rough rocks of the cliff, down through the air to fall at last into the white waves of the ocean, dark, eternal. There was a small spray of water, and the waters of the deep closed over all.

He turned and stepped back into the house, noting above him the one star that moved among all the others. It was almost time for pickup.

And below the cliffs, the waves burned with phosphorescence.

It had been a beautiful death.

Beautiful.

He stood again in the ship, the air still strong with ozone from the pickup chamber.

He wanted to do something important, but he didn't know what it was.

Behind him, men were moving the last of his equipment from the chamber to the storage holds, while others were moving the last of his recording crystals to the special room that would keep them safe from harm. He had done his own job well, recording all works of art and literature that he had found to be beautiful in the area assigned to him. He hoped the others, in this ship and in others around the planet, had done as well.

His executive officer walked towards him slowly. "You are the last, sir. We're ready to move to the rendezvous point."

"Let's go then."

There was a slight tingling as the drive was applied, and he turned to his console with an emptiness aching inside him.

On the screen he saw the blazing sun, far behind now and slowly falling behind even more. Someday it would expand in a process not completely understood and claim the debt owed it by its first four daughters.

And another planet that had produced beauty would be lost.

He knew now that he wanted his eyes to bleed with tears as the girl's had done before she had gone to her beautiful end, but his people had forgotten how twenty-five thousand years ago.

There was a roaring that was swelling out and filling the universe to its deepest core. At first he thought that it was the memory of an ocean that his people had lost long ago, but then he realized that it was his own blood rushing through his veins, dark, eternal. ◄

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SCIENCE

THE TERRIBLE LIZARDS

by Isaac Asimov

JAMES D. WATSON HAS RECENTLY published a book, THE DOUBLE HELIX, in which he details the inside story of the discovery of the structure of the DNA molecule. The book is making the headlines not because of the importance of the subject but because of the fact that it exposes scientists as human beings possessed of human failings.

Well, why not? A great intellect need not necessarily be accompanied by a great soul. There are villains among scientists as among any other group.

My own pet candidate for a high place in scientific villainy is Sir Richard Owen, a 19th-Century English zoologist. He was the last of the top-rank "nature-philosophers" who had taken up the mystical notion of the German naturalist, Lorenz Oken. These believed in evolutionary development through vague internal forces that drove creatures on to some particular end.

When, in 1859, Charles Darwin published THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES, in which he presented evidence for evolution by natural selection, Owen was horrified. Natural selection, as Darwin described it, was a blind force, changing species through its action on random variations among individuals.

Owen could not accept evolution by random effects, and he came out against Darwin. That, of course, was his right. It was even his scientific duty to disagree with all his might. Darwin's suggestion, like all scientific suggestions, had to survive the battles fought in the intellectual arena, and no honorable weapon was outlawed in such battles.

No *honorable* weapon. Owen chose to review Darwin's ORIGIN OF SPECIES in as many different outlets as he could wangle. He chose to make those reviews anonymously and to quote extensively and with wor-

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shipful approval from his own work, making himself sound like a crowd. He chose to give an unfair summary of the contents of the book and to ridicule it rather than to present opposing testimony objectively. Worst of all, he urged others to denounce Darwin, vitriolically and unscientifically, feeding lay speakers misinformaton for the purpose.

In short, Owen was cowardly, spiteful and contemptible, and it is a source of gratification to me that he lost out.

Yet that can't be allowed to obscure the fact that he made important contributions to biology. He discovered the parathyroid glands in 1852, while dissecting a rhinoceros. (It was to be quite some years before they were found in man as well.) He was the first to describe the recently extinct moas of New Zealand and the anything but extinct (alas!) parasite that was later found to be the cause of trichinosis.

His greatest fame to the general public, however, lies in a single word. He was one of the earliest of those who studied the fossils of certain giant creatures, long since extinct, who soon caught the imagination of the world. Weighing up to five times the size of the largest living elephant, they shook the ground between 70 and 270 million years ago.

The huge skeletons that were built up out of the fossilized remnants were clearly reptilian in nature, so Owen called them "terrible lizards" and since he used Greek, that became "Dinosauria." (Actually, those ancient giant reptiles are more closely related to alligators than to lizards, but I must admit that "Dinocrocodilia" would have been a rotten name.)

The name caught on and today, I am sure, many American children can describe various dinosaurs even though they can't describe a hippopotamus and never even heard of an okapi.

Yet for all the fame of the word, and for all its continuing popularity, it has passed out of the scientific picture. As it turns out, there is no single group of animals we can call by that name. The term is gone from the chart of animal classification. You can look it over from top to bottom and you will find nothing labelled "Dinosauria." (Ha, ha, for you, Sir Richard Owen.)

Furthermore, dinosaurs were not necessarily large and monstrous. Many of them were quite small and were considerably less "terrible" than, say, an angry police dog. Then, too, some of the large extinct reptiles that look terrible indeed are not considered dinosaurs in the strictest sense of the word.

So let's go into the matter of the terrible lizards and find out what they are and aren't.

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In classifying ancient reptiles one must, of necessity, use bone structure as the source of distinctions, for it is only the bones of these long-dead creatures that we have left to study. The skull is used quite often, because it has a complicated structure of many bones, and this structure appears in convenient broad variations.

For instance, the class "Reptilia" is divided into six subclasses in accordance, to a large extent, with the structure of the skull. The most primitive skulls have the bony structure behind the eye socket solidly enclosed. Such a skull belongs to the subclass "Anapsida" ("no opening").*

The earliest important reptiles, of the order "Cotylosauria" ("cup-lizards," because of their cup-shaped vertebrae), had anapsid skulls. These cotylosaurs, low-slung, stocky, not more than six feet long and not terribly far advanced over their amphibian forebears, existed about 300,000,000 years ago. They are often called the "stem-reptiles" since they represent the stem of the reptile family tree, from which all later forms branched off—though the cotylosaurs themselves are long since extinct, of course.

One group of their descendants who appeared early (perhaps 230,000,000 years ago), and only one, retained the anapsid skull. Oddly enough, this primitive order still exists, although more advanced cousins have long since grown extinct. This is the order Chelonia ("turtle"), which, of course, includes the turtles and tortoises.

Another type of reptilian skull has an opening behind the eye socket. Creatures with such skulls make up the suborder "Synapsida" ("with opening"). This entire suborder is extinct; at least, there are no living reptiles with synapsid skulls. However, descended from these Synapsida are the mammals of today, and I would like to say nothing further on this suborder in this article. (I have my reasons, never you fear.)

There are two other kinds of reptilian skulls with a single opening behind the eye sockets. The arrangement of the bones around that opening differ in the two cases, and both differ from the arrangement in the synapsid skulls. So we have the suborders "Parapsida" ("side opening") and "Euryapsida" ("wide opening"). Both of these suborders are totally

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* *Actually, the Greek "apsis" means "wheel," "arch," "vault" and a few other things. If we take the meaning of "wheel," and consider that it might be applied to a roughly circular opening, we might as well translate the word as "opening" and make it clear. In this article, I will try to give the literal meanings of the zoological terms, which are almost always in Greek or Latin, of course. I must not conceal from you that I don't always know why those literal meanings have been chosen and if any Gentle Reader knows, I will welcome the information.*

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extinct. There are no living reptiles with either paraptid or euryaptid skulls. Nor have any non-reptilian forms been descended from them.

The most familiar of the parapsids are the "Ichthyosauria" ("fish-lizards"). This is a good name because at their first fossilized appearance, 220,000,000 years ago or so, they had already been living in the sea so long as to become completely adapted to it. They had assumed the streamlined fish shape just as some of our modern sea-mammals have. In fact, they very closely resemble long-snouted dolphins.

Of course, when we speak of ichthyosaurs, we don't speak of a particular animal, but of a large group of diverse animals. There were species of ichthyosaurs which were no more than two feet long, for instance, and other species which reached lengths of sixty feet. The largest ichthyosaurs were the size of the modern sperm whale and were, in their time (180,000,000 years ago), the largest animals alive. By forty million years later, the giant species had died out and considerably smaller species, with shorter tails and no teeth, took their place.

We arrive now at a tricky point. The ichthyosaurs, despite their outward fishlike appearance, are complete and thoroughgoing reptiles. They are quite extinct, and some of them were enormous. Does not this qualify them—as large, extinct reptiles—to be considered among the dinosaurs?

In popular speech, they surely are, but to purists this is not proper. Almost all the creatures popularly called dinosaurs belong to a particular subclass of Reptilia, and Parapsida is not it. Strictly speaking, creatures outside that one subclass have no claim on the term, and in that sense the ichthyosaurs are not dinosaurs.

Passing on to Euryapsida, we have as the best-known examples, other aquatic creatures only slightly less well adapted for sea-life than the ichthyosaurs. All have limbs adapted for paddling and swimming. Some look as though they can still hobble around on land, but one group is so completely paddle-equipped that it clearly cannot leave the sea. These are the Plesiosauria ("near-lizards" because they looked pretty much like reptiles except for the oddity of four paddles in place of ordinary limbs).

If the ichthyosaurs were the reptilian equivalent of whales and dolphins, the plesiosaurs seem to be reptilian seals. Their most remarkable attribute, perhaps, was their long neck, which they undoubtedly sent darting forward, like animated spears, after fish. At the height of the age of reptiles, 100,000,000 years ago, certain varieties were fifty feet long or more, with necks making up two-thirds of this total length. One of

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these gigantic varieties, the Elasmosaurus ("plated lizard"*) probably had the longest neck ever existing on Earth.

The plesiosaurs look much more like the ordinary notion of the dinosaur than the ichthyosaurs do. They have small heads, long necks and tails, and barrel-like bodies. And yet the plesiosaurs are not dinosaurs because they, too, like the ichthyosaurs, belong to the wrong subclass.

That brings us to the last of the five kinds of reptilian skulls and, in a purely reptilian sense, the most successful by far.†

In this last kind of skull, there are two openings behind the eye socket, and such a skull is a "diapsid" ("two openings") skull. There is, however, no subclass bearing that name. The reason for this is that there are no less than two important suborders with diapsid skulls and neither can claim sole possession of the title.

The first of the diapsid subclasses is "Lepidosauria" ("scaled lizards" —from Greek). This includes, as its most important order, "Squamata" ("scaly"—from Latin), which includes the most successful of living reptiles, the snakes and lizards.

Another order of lepidosaurs, "Rhynchocephalia" ("snout-heads", because they have prominent, beaky snouts) is interesting for a completely different reason; not because it is flourishing, but because it has avoided extinction by the narrowest possible margin—a single rare species. The order was never very important and, except for that one survivor, died out about 70,000,000 years ago. But there remains that one survivor.

It is a moderately large lizard-like creature, no more than 30 inches long, at most, from snout to tail-tip. In recent times it was still to be found on the main islands of New Zealand, but no longer. It is now to be found only on a few offshore New Zealand islets where it is sternly protected by law. Its common name is "tuatara" ("back spine", in native Maori, since in addition to the scales that cover its body, it has a line of spines down its backbone). Its more formal name is "sphenodon" ("wedge-tooth"), which is the name of its genus.

Despite its looks, it is not a lizard. It has a bony arch in its skull that no lizard possesses (the first giveaway to the early dissectors that they had something unusual in hand). It also has a "nictitating membrane"

** Here's a literal meaning with a reason that eludes me. Did it have plate-like scales?*

† I qualify the statement because the synapsids, although only moderately successful as reptiles, did give rise to the mammals, and that must be considered an enormous, if non-reptilian, success.

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in its eyes that birds possess, but not lizards. Finally it has a particularly well-developed pineal gland at the top of its brain, something lizards do not have (or any other animal either). In the young sphenodon, it bears the anatomical appearance of a third eye, though there is no indication yet that it is light-sensitive.

The second diapsid subclass is "Archosauria" ("ruling reptiles") and it is this subclass, and this subclass only, as the name implies, to which dinosaurs belong.

Of course, we might stop to ask why two subclasses are made out of creatures that all have diapsid skulls. Well, there are other distinctions. For one thing, the archosaurs have teeth set in sockets and the lepidosaurs (with one very minor exception) don't. This seems an unimportant distinction to the layman, perhaps, but it isn't. The improvement in tooth-efficiency is such that the archosaurs became, for a time, the most successful of all the reptilian subclasses. Besides, one such distinction is usually representative of a whole family of distinctions.

The most primitive archosaurs make up the order "Thecodontia" ("socket teeth") and it is from these that all other archosaurs developed, though they themselves are long since extinct.

Many of the thecodonts were rather on the small side and adopted a bipedal posture. The fore-limbs were reduced in size, the hind-limbs enlarged and strengthened, and a long-balancing tail was developed. They rather looked like reptilian kangaroos.

Certain heavier and clumsier thecodonts, however, were forced to remain on all fours, and these developed into the order "Crocodilia" which survives, of course, to this day. The alligators and crocodiles are the only living reptiles that belong to the subclass, Archosauria, the one to which the dinosaurs belong. And yet crocodiles are not to be considered dinosaurs, even though they are their closest living relatives. The dinosaurs are restricted to two orders, and only two orders, within the subclass. The alligators and crocodiles are outside those two orders and are *therefore not dinosaurs.*

More spectacular is another group of thecodont descendants, which make up the order "Pterosauria" ("winged lizards"). These were lighter still, developed long thin webs based on enlarged little fingers, made wings out of them and were the only reptiles ever to engage in true flight.

The early pterosaurs had long heads with sharp teeth, and long tails, too. The later ones grew larger, had much shorter tails and often lacked teeth altogether. About 150,000,000 years ago, the skies held the larg-

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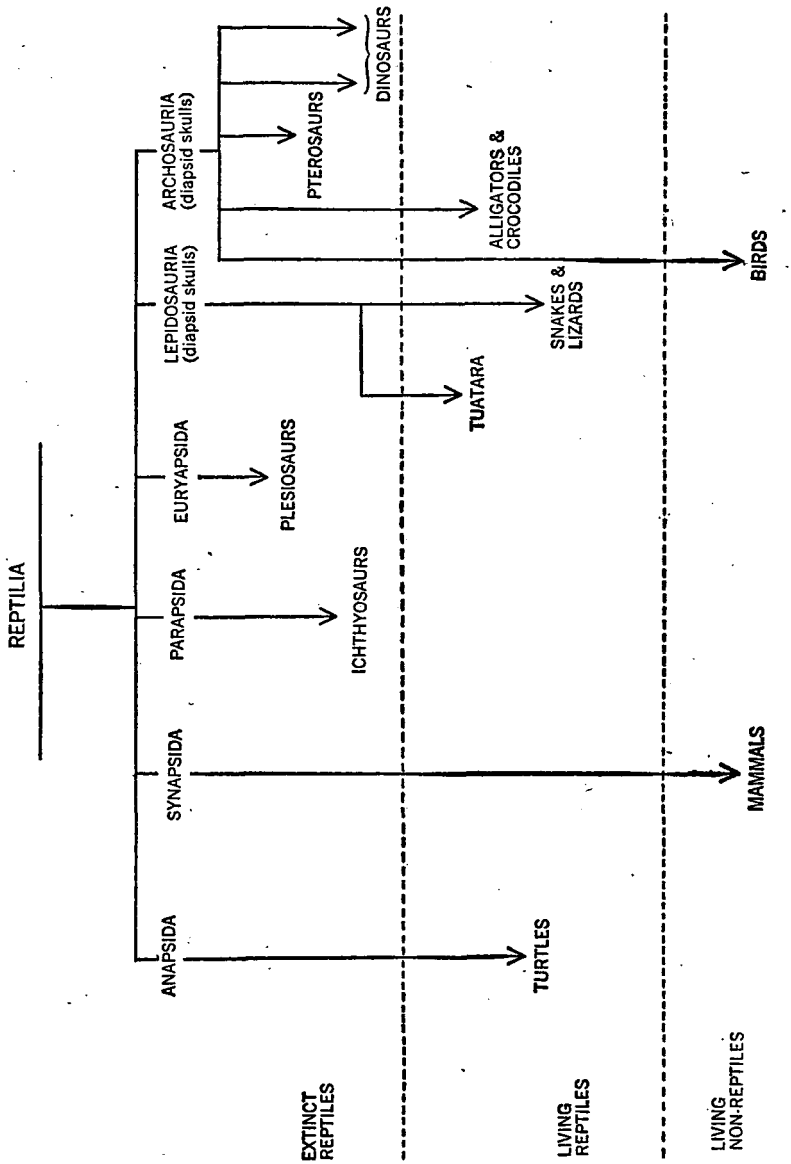
Table 1—The Reptiles



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est of all the pterosaurs. This was "Pteranodon" ("wing-tooth," because it retained numerous needle-like teeth). It had a wing-span of about twenty feet and a long-crested skull some three feet from end to end. It was by all odds the largest flying creature that ever lived.

But the pterosaurs were not the only descendants of the thecodonts to learn the secret of true flight. Another group converted its scales into feathers and from these descended a group of creatures, the birds, so radically different from other reptiles in so many ways, as to deserve being placed in a class of its own, "Aves."

There now remains the two orders of archosaurs (both entirely extinct) that contain the dinosaurs. To simplify their relationship to other reptiles, see Table 1, which deals mainly with zoological classification and is *not* primarily concerned with lines of evolutionary development.

If the two orders could be grouped into one, that combined order would undoubtedly have retained Owen's title of "Dinosauria." However, a closer study of the creatures soon showed that there were important distinctions to be made among them, notably in the pelvic girdle (or hipbone).

Since the ancestral dinosaurs had the bipedal gait of the thecodonts, the pelvic girdle had to bear the full weight of the animal. The pelvic girdle was therefore strengthened, and its three chief bones strengthened in the course of evolution. The uppermost bone of the girdle, the ilium, was enlarged and came to be fused to the backbone to produce a structure of great solidity and strength. This fusion is characteristic of both orders and is therefore an important characteristic mark of the dinosaur.

There are two other bones to the girdle, however. In some dinosaurs these remained well separated and were set nearly at right angles. This rather resembles the situation in living lizards, and so all dinosaurs with this arrangement of hipbones are placed in the order "Saurischia" ("lizard-hip").

In the remaining dinosaurs, the two lower bones of the pelvic girdle are lined up closely parallel and slant backward. This arrangement resembles that in birds, and so these are placed in the order "Ornithischia" ("bird-hip").

Nor is the distinction a petty one in zoological terms. So noticeable is it, that once the difference in hip-girdles is explained, anyone at all can tell whether a dinosaur belongs to one group or the other by one quick glance at the skeleton.

It is for this reason that "dinosaur" is no longer a formal zoological term. One can, and often does, speak of "saurischian dinosaurs" and

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"ornithischian dinosaurs." It is more appropriate, however, to speak of "saurischians" and "ornithischians", leaving out the word dinosaur altogether.

The saurischians had their hey day first. These are divided into two suborders "Therapoda" ("beast-feet") and "Sauropoda" ("lizard-feet") because the leg bones of the former more closely resemble those of mammals than do the leg bones of the latter.

An easier way of distinguishing the two suborders is to remember that the therapods are bipeds and the sauropods are quadrupeds.

The earliest of the therapods were, in fact, very much like the thecodonts—light, small bipeds adapted for fast running. These were the "Coelurosaurs" ("hollow lizards," because their bones were hollow for the sake of lightening the body structure). Many of these were quite small and one, "Compsognathus" ("elegant jaw," because it was so small and delicate) was only about the size of a chicken and was the smallest of the known dinosaurs.

However, there was a general tendency for species to grow larger as the ages wore on—perhaps because increasing competition among the various dinosaurs put an increasing premium on strength. By the late Cretaceous, 80,000,000 years ago, coelurosaurs the size of ostriches had evolved. One of them was almost exactly the size and shape of an ostrich, with a small head sporting a horny, toothless beak, a long neck and powerful legs. Even though it had scales rather than feathers, forearms with clutching fingers instead of stubby, vestigial wings, and a long tail instead of plumes, it is still called "Ornithomimus" ("bird-imitator").

Another line of therapods were the "Carnosaurs" ("meat-lizards"), so called because they were characteristically meat-eating. So were the coelurosaurs, as a matter of fact, but the physical appearance of the carnosaurs made the fact much more horribly evident in their case.

The carnosaurs retained the bipedal structure but went in for size far beyond anything the coelurosaurs could do. By the late Cretaceous, this had reached its maximum in "Tyrannosaurus" ("master-lizard") whose four-foot-long head was carried some nineteen feet above the ground. The full length of its body, from snout to tale-tip, was probably something like 25 feet, but its forelegs were tiny, not much longer than a man's, and far too short to be of any use. They couldn't even reach the mouth.

The jaws of the tyrannosaurus could do their work without help, however. Its many teeth were up to six inches long and it is clear from

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its skeleton alone that it was the most nightmarish creature that ever clumped the Earth. It is the largest land-carnivore on record, being at least as massive as the largest elephant (which is herbivorous) that ever lived.

The enormous thighs of the tyrannosaurus show clearly that it was approaching the practical limits for bipedality. Still larger therapods dropped to all fours. Their size made them clumsy and slow-moving and, therefore, inefficient at catching game. They developed small heads, feeble teeth, and became adapted to a herbivorous diet.

From them were developed the sauropods. These gigantic creatures are the most familiar, in appearance, of all dinosaurs. They are super-elephantine in structure, with long necks at one end and long tails at the other. Indeed, they look like giant snakes that have swallowed giant elephants, with the columnar legs of the latter breaking through and walking off with the creature.

There are clear signs of the bipedal ancestry of the sauropods, for all that they clump down so hard on four legs. In most cases, the forelegs remain shorter than the hind-legs so that their backs slope upward and reach a peak at the hips.

The longest of all the sauropods is "Diplodocus" ("double beam"). Some specimens have been found which measured nearly 90 feet from the snout to the tip of its long tapering tail. No other animal was ever longer except for some of the very largest whales.

However, the diplodocus is a slenderly built creature and is by no means the most massive dinosaur. The "Brontosaurus" ("thunder-lizard"), though shorter, is more massive and may have weighed up to 35 tons.

More massive still is the "Brachiosaurus" ("arm-lizards," so called because in the course of evolution, its fore-limbs had finally developed to the point where they had overtaken the hind-limbs and were longer.) The Brachiosaurus may have weighed up to 50 tons and was the largest land-animal that ever lived.

It is hard, though, to be sure how far we can justify the phrase "land-animal." It is very likely that the large sauropods lived in rivers and lakes as modern hippopotami do, and for the same reason. They find their food there, as well as a certain protection, and the water buoys up their giant weights. In fact, I wonder if a full-grown sauropod might not be as helpless as a whale if it were ever stranded on truly dry land.

The ornithischians, who were the more specialized of the two groups,

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did not come into their own until about 150,000,000 years ago, tens of millions of years after the saurischians had already developed into a variety of flourishing forms.

The ornithischians were all herbivores and their smaller representatives also retained the bipedality of the original dinosaurian ancestor, though their forelimbs never got as small as was the case among the saurischian bipeds.

Typical were the duck-bill dinosaurs, which developed a broad, flat jaw to handle their vegetable diet. The largest of these, "Iguanodon" ("iguana-like teeth"), stood 15 feet high. It might resemble a tyrannosaurus when seen quickly, from a distance, but it was quite harmless unless it stepped on you or fell on you.

Most of the ornithischians gained protection against the carnosaurs by developing armor of one sort or another. One of the best known is "Stegosaurus" ("roof-lizard"). It received its name because its skeleton was found in association with large bony plates which, it was first assumed, protected its back like shingles on a roof. Closer study showed that they stood on end in a double row from neck to the root of the tail, while the tip of the tail was armed with two pairs of long, pointed bony spikes.

The stegosaurus showed clear signs of ancestral bipedality, for its front legs were little more than half the length of the hind. Its tiny head contained a brain no larger than a modern kitten's, though it was thirty feet long and more massive than an elephant. The stegosaurus is the very epitome of dinosaurian brainlessness.

It became extinct in the early Cretaceous, probably before tyrannosaurus appeared on the scene. The famous sequence in Walt Disney's production "Fantasia" in which a tyrannosaurus attacks and kills a stegosaurus, though highly effective, is very likely anachronistic.

An armored ornithischian which evolved later than stegosaurus and was indeed contemporary with tyrannosaurus was "Ankylosaurus" ("crooked-lizard"), and this was probably the most heavily armored creature of all time. It was a low, broad dinosaur that could not be easily overturned to expose its unarmored belly. Its back, from skull to tail, was layered with massive bony plates, which, along the sides, were drawn out into strong spikes. The tail ended in a bony knob that probably had the force of a battering ram when swung. It was a veritable living tank, and I wonder what a battle between *it* and a tyrannosaurus would be like.

Finally there is the Triceratops ("three-horned"), which was built like a super-rhinoceros. Its armor was concentrated in its head region. A

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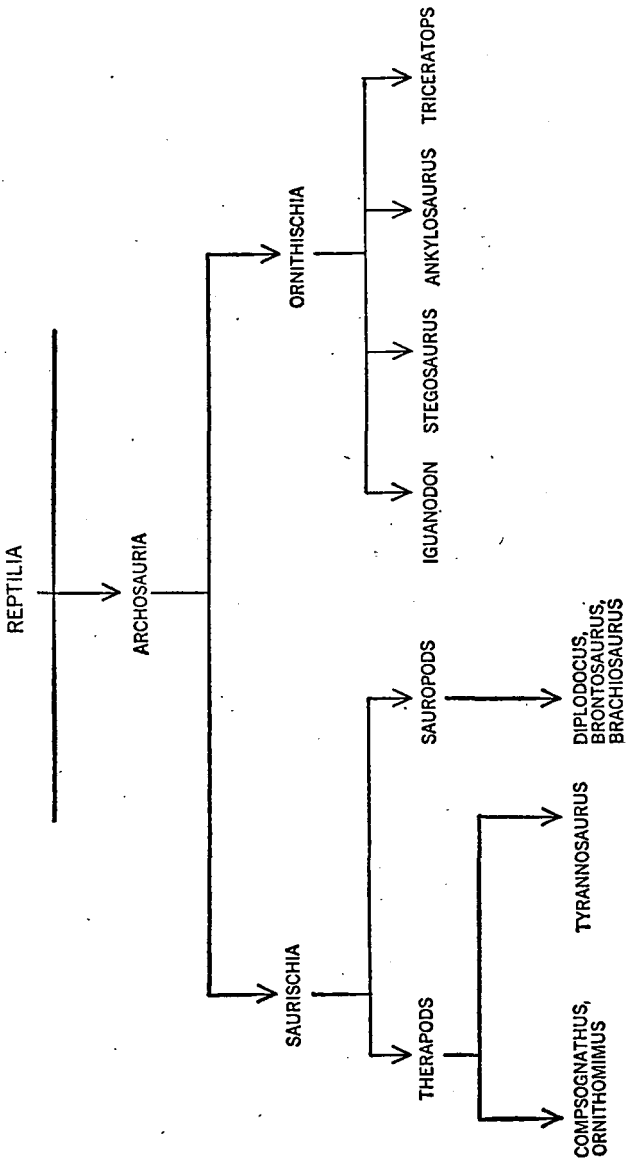
Table 2—The Dinosaurs



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broad frill of bone, six feet across, extended from the head and covered the neck. The face bore three horns, two long sharp ones over the eyes and a shorter, blunter one in the nose. In addition, the mouth was equipped with a strong, parrot-like beak.

For a summary of dinosaur relationships, see Table 2.

But then came the end of the Cretaceous, 70,000,000 years ago, and something happened; we don't know what. All the dinosaurs that then existed, both saurischian and ornithischian, died off in a relatively short time. So did the spectacular non-dinosaur reptiles, the ichthyosaurs, plesiosaurs and pterosaurs. So did some spectacular creatures who were not reptiles, such as the invertebrate ammonites.

There have been almost as many theories to account for this as there have been paleontologists, and lately there was published a particularly interesting one which I hope to mention next month.

ADDENDUM

I think it only fair to myself and to the Gentle Readership to tell them whenever a speculation of mine seems to begin to look good. Richard Henry, an astrophysicist at Natural Research Laboratories, has recently made measurements of x-ray intensities from outer space. Assuming the radiation might arise from energetic hydrogen atoms between the galaxies, he deduced the mass of such matter from the observed x-ray intensities. He ended with the conclusion that there is a hundred times as much mass in the hard vacuum of intergalactic space as in the relatively crowded precincts within the galaxies.

And where do I come in? Well, in a strictly speculative piece entitled NOTHING, which appeared in the March 1959 issue of F & SF as the fifth article of this series, I came to very much the same conclusion.

—ISAAC ASIMOV

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Sterling Lanier (WHOSE SHORT HAPPY LIFE? *March 1968*) *has politely responded to our nagging requests for biographical information as follows: "Age 40. Married, one two-year old son. Have been a soldier (two enlistments), anthropologist and an editor. My current professions are those of writer and sculptor, the latter mostly of animals, miniatures done in bronze, silver and gold." Mr. Lanier's latest story is the first of several good ones we have on hand concerning the adventures of Brigadier Donald Ffellowes, who did not eat crab. And for good reason.*

SOLDIER KEY

by Sterling E. Lanier

EVERYONE IN THE CLUB, EVEN those who disliked him, agreed that Brigadier ("not Brigadier General, please") Donald Ffellowes. R.A., ret., could tell a good yarn when he chose. He seemed to have been in the British Army, the Colonial Police and M.I.-5 as well at one time or another, and to have served all over the globe.

People who loathed him and the English generally, said all his tales were lies, that he was a remittance man, and that his gift for incredible stories was a direct inheritance from Sir John Mandeville, the medieval rumormonger. Still, even those who denounced his stories the most loudly never left once he started of them. If Ffellowes was a liar, he was an awfully good one.

Mason Williams, who was one of those who resented Ffellowes as both British and overbearing, had instantly ordered stone crab when he saw it on the club's lunch menu. Of the eight others present at the big table that day, only one besides Williams had ever had stone crab, but we all decided to try it, that is, except Ffellowes.

"No, thank you," he repeated coldly, "I'll have the sweetbreads. I don't eat crab or any crustacean, for that matter. I used to love it," he went on, "in fact I ate crab, lobster, langouste, crawfish and shrimp with the best of you at one time. Until 1934 to be exact. An unpleasant and perhaps peculiar set of circumstances caused me to stop. Perhaps you would care to hear why?

"Now, I couldn't get it past my mouth, and if I did I couldn't swallow it. You see, something happened. . . ."

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His voice trailed away into silence, and we could all see that his thoughts were elsewhere. He stared at the snowy tablecloth for a moment and then looked up with an apologetic smile. We waited, and not even Williams seemed anxious to interrupt.

"I've never told anyone about this, but I suppose I ought, really. It's a quite unbelievable story, and not a very nice one. Yet, if you'd like to hear it?" he queried again.

An instant chorus of affirmation rose from around the table. We were all men who had traveled and seen at least something of life, but none of our tales ever matched what we extracted from Ffellowes at long intervals.

"Wait until after dinner," was all he would say. "I need a good meal under my belt and some coffee and a cigar before this one."

The rest of us looked at one another rather like boys who have been promised a treat, as indeed we had. Williams grunted something, but made no objection. His denunciations of the British always came *after* Ffellowes' stories, I noticed.

When we were settled in our leather chairs in an alcove of the huge library, with cigars drawing and coffee and brandy beside us, Ffellowes began.

"Did any of you ever sail the Caribbean in the pre-War period? I don't mean on a cruise ship, although that's fun. I mean actually sailed, in a small boat or yacht, touching here and there, calling at ports when you felt like it and then moving on? If not, you've missed something.

"The dawns were fantastic and the sunsets better. The food from the galley, fresh fish we'd caught ourselves usually, was superb, and the salt got into our skin, baked there by the sun.

"Islands rose up out of the sea, sometimes green and mountainous like Jamaica, sometimes low and hidden by mangroves and reefs like the Caymans or Inagua.

"We called at funny little ports and gave drinks to local officials who came aboard and got tight and friendly and told us astonishing scandals and implausible state secrets, and finally staggered off, swearing eternal friendship.

"And then at dawn, we hoisted anchor, set sail and checked our charts, and off we went to see what was over the next horizon, because there was always another island."

He paused and sipped his coffee, while we waited in silence.

"I had three months leave on half pay at the time due to a mix-up; so Joe Chapin and I (he's dead a long time, poor fellow, killed at Kohima) chartered an island schooner at Nassau and hired two colored men to help us work her and cook. They were from Barbados and wanted to get back there, and that suited us. Badians are good seamen and

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good men, too. One, the older, was called Maxton, the other, Oswald, and I've forgotten their last names. We told them to call us Joe and Don, but it was always 'Mistah Don, Sah' to me, and 'Cap'n' to Joe, because he was officially captain on the papers.

"Well, we sailed along south for a month or so, calling here and there, picking up news and having fun at this port or that, until we got to Basse-Terre on Gualdeloupe. We were ashore having a few rums in the bar with the port officials when we first heard of Soldier Key.

"Any of you ever hear of it? Well, you won't now because it's gone. The people are anyway. The big hurriance of 1935 smashed it more than flat, and I'm told the few people left were moved by the British government. I checked up later on and found they went first to Dominica and then elsewhere, but there weren't many left.

"At any rate, the French customs officer we were drinking with suggested we look in at Soldier Key if we wanted an unusual, what you call 'offbeat', place to visit.

" 'Messieurs,' he told us, 'this is a very strange place. You will not, I think, call twice, because few do, but I do not think you will be bored. These people are British like yourselves, and yet the island has no British official in residence, which is odd. They have an agreement with the government of Dominica that they govern themselves. Twice a year comes an inspection, but otherwise they are alone, with none to disturb them. Curious, is it not?'

"We agreed it sounded mildly strange, but asked why we should bother going at all?

" 'As to that,' he said, 'you must suit yourselves. But you English always seek new things, and this place is a strange one. The people are, how you say it, *forgot* by everyone. They trade little, selling only *langouste* (the spiny lobster) and the meat of green turtle. They are good seamen, but they call at few ports and avoid other fishing boats. For some reason, they never sell the turtle shell, although they could catch all the shell turtles they wish. I cannot tell you more, except I once called there for water when on a cruise and the place made me feel discomfortable.' He paused and tried to convey what he meant. 'Look, these Key of the Soldier people all belong to one church, not mine or yours either. To them, all who are not of this communion are damned eternally, and when they look at you, you feel they wish to speed the process. A funny place, Messieurs, but interesting.'

"He finished his rum and stood up to go. 'And another thing, Messieurs,' he said, 'all people of color dislike this place, and there are none of them who live there.

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Again, interesting, eh? Why not try it? You may be amused.'

"Well, after we got back to the boat, we hauled out our charts and looked for Soldier Key. It was there all right, but it was quite easy to see how one could miss it. It lay about two days sail West by Northwest of Dominica, and it looked like a pretty small place indeed. The copy of the *Mariner's Guide* we had wasn't really new, and it gave the population as five hundred (approximately) with exports limited to lobster and imports nil. A footnote said it was settled in 1881 by the Church of the New Revelation. This, of course, must be the church to which our little customs official had been referring, but I'd never heard of it, nor had Joe. Still, there are millions of sects all over the place; so that meant nothing, really.

"Finally, before we turned in, Joe had an idea. 'I'm certain someone has some reference books in town,' he said. 'I'll have a dekko tomorrow morning, first thing, shall I?'

"Well, he did, and about noon, when I was considering the day's first drink in the same waterfront bar as the night before, he came in with a small volume, very worn-looking, in his hand.

" 'Look at this,' he said, 'I found it in the local library; been there forever, I should think.'

"What he had in his hand was a slim, black book, written in English, cheaply bound and very tattered, with brown pages crumbling at the edges. It was dated London, 1864, and was written by someone who called himself, the Opener of the Gate, Brother A. Poole. The title of the book was *The New Revelation Revealed to the Elect.*

" 'One of those island people must have left it here on their way through,' I said, 'or perhaps some fisherman lost it. Have you looked at it?'

"We read it aloud in turn, as much as we could stand, that is, because it was heavy going, and it was really a very boring book. A good bit of it came from Revelation and also the nastier bits of the Old Testament, and practically all of it was aimed at warning Those Who Transgressed.

"But there were stranger parts of it, based apparently on Darwin, of all people, and even some Jeremy Bentham. All in all, a weirder hodgepodge was never assembled, even by your Aimee Semple McPherson or our own Muggletonians.

"The final summing up of the hundred pages or so, was a caution, or rather summons, to the Faithful, to withdraw from the world to a Secluded Spot at the first opportunity. Judging from what we had heard, Soldier Key was the Secluded Spot.

" 'It would be fascinating to find out what a gang like this has

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done in seventy years of isolation, don't you think?' said Joe. I agreed. It sounded like giving a new twist to our trip.

"Well, we weighed anchor that afternoon, after a farewell drink with our customs friend, and his last words intrigued us still more.

" 'Have you any weapons on board?'

"I answered that we had a shark rifle, a .30-30 Winchester carbine, and a Colt .45 automatic pistol.

" 'Good. I think less well today than I did last night of having directed you to this place. There are strange rumors among les Noirs of Soldier Key. Send me a card from your next port, as a favor, eh?'

"We promised and then said goodbye. Once clear of the harbor, we plotted a course and then told the two crewmen where we were going. The reaction was intriguing.

"Maxton, the older, looked rather glum, but Oswald, who was a six-foot black Hercules, actually forgot his usual respectful terms of address.

" 'Mon, what you go theah fo'? They not good people theah; wery bad people on Soljah Cay, Mon!'

"When Joe and I pressed them to say why exactly they disliked the place, they could not, or would not, give us any answers, except that no one went there from other islands and that the folk were unfriendly, especially to colored people.

" 'Come, come, Oswald,' said Joe finally, 'there surely must be something you are not telling us.'

"The man stared at the deck and finally mumbled something about 'Duppies'.

"Well, you know, this made us laugh and that was an error. Duppies are West Indian ghosts, evil spirits, and are objects of fear among all British West Indian Negroes from Jamaica to Trinidad. When we joshed these two men about them, they shut up like oysters! Not one further word could we get out of them about Soldier Key. No, that's not right. I got one more thing a day later.

"Oswald was fishing with a hand line from the stern at a time when I had the helm. I had asked him idly what he was using for bait.

"He reached into a metal pail beside him and pulled out a huge black and grey snail's shell about six inches across. 'Soljah, Mistah Don, Sah.' I noticed he held it gingerly, and I suddenly saw why. The owner of the shell was not the original snail at all, but a weird-looking crab, with great orange and purple claws, too large for its size, beady eyes on stalks and a mass of red spiky legs. In fact, it was the northern hermit crab, simply grown huge and aggressive in the tropics. Its claws snapped and clicked as it tried to reach his fingers, and then he dropped it back into the pail.

" 'They are many of thom where

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we go, Mistah Don, Sah, wery many of the Soljahs.'

"So here was the reason for the name of the island! I had been speculating to myself as to whether the British had ever had a fort there, but the explanation was much simpler. Hermit Crab Island! Under this new name, it made all the vague warnings of our French friend seem quite silly, and when I told Joe about it later when we changed watch, he rather agreed.

"We made our landfall in a trifle under three days, due mostly to light airs, you know. The island was flat, only about seven miles long and two wide; so it would not have been a hard place to miss, actually. We came steadily in from the East, took down sail and started the auxiliary engine, because there was a circular reef marked on the charts as extending almost completely around the island and it only had a few navigable openings.

"It was evening, and the sun was on the horizon when we saw the first lights of the island's only town. There was a hundred-yard passage through the reef, marked clearly as showing seven fathoms opposite the town; so we brought the schooner in until we were no more than fifty or so yards offshore.

"The town lay in a semicircle about a shallow bay. There was a broken beach, with bits of low cliff about five feet above the water, which we could just dimly make out. I say dimly because it was now completely dark and there was no moon, only Caribbean starlight, although that's pretty bright.

"We switched off the engine, anchored and watched the town, because it was the oddest-appearing port we had ever seen. There wasn't a sound. A few dimmish lights, perhaps half a dozen, burned in windows at wide intervals, but no dogs barked, no rooster crowed, no noise of voices came over the water. There was a gentle breeze in our rigging and the lapping of wavelets on the hull, and that was all.

"Against the sky at one point to the left, we could see the loom of some tall building, and we thought that this might be a church, but what we were to make of this silence baffled us. Night, especially the evening, is a lively time in the tropics, in fact the liveliest. Where were the people?

"We debated going ashore and decided against it. I say 'we', but I assure you our crew wasn't debating. They had made it quite plain earlier that they were not going even if ordered, not even in daylight.

" 'This is a bod place, Cap'n,' said Oswald to Joe. 'We do not wish to discommode you, Sah, but we don't go on thot land, at all, Sah, no!'

"And that was that. So, we set

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anchor watch and turned in. A few mosquitoes came out from shore but not many, and we fell asleep with no trouble at all, determined to solve the mystery of the quiet in the morning.

"I was awakened by a hand on my arm. I blinked because it was still pitch-black out, and I looked at my watch. It was two a.m. Against the stars I could see Joe's head as he stooped over me.

" 'Come on deck, Don,' he said, 'and listen.' Even as he spoke, I was conscious that the night was no longer completely quiet.

"On deck, the four of us, for the two crewmen were up too, crouched in the cockpit, and we all strained our ears.

"The sound we were hearing was quite far off, a mile at the very least from the volume, but it was unmistakably the sound of many human voices singing. To us, it sounded like a hymn, but the tune was not a familiar one.

"After what seemed about twenty-three stanzas, it stopped, and we listened in the silent night again. Then, there came a distant shout, somewhat sustained and again silence for a moment. Then the rhythmic mass cry again, but longer this time and seeming to go up and down. It went on this way for about ten minutes, first the silence and then the noise of human voices, and I tried without success to make out what was going on. Joe got the clue first.

" 'Responses,' he said, and of course, that was it. We were listening to something very like a psalm, chanted by a lot of people, a long way off, and naturally we couldn't hear the minister at all, but only the antiphony.

"After a bit, it stopped, and after fifteen minutes or so we turned in again. Now we knew why the town was quiet. All the people, apparently including the babies, were celebrating a church service somewhere inland. The Church of the New Revelation seemed to go in for midnight services.

"Well, we woke at 6 a.m. to a typical blazing Caribbean morning and also to a visitor. Standing on the edge of the deck coaming was the hatless figure of a man, staring down at Joe and myself out of pale blue eyes.

"He was about sixty from his looks, clean-shaven and sallow, with thick white hair and a gaunt, peaked face. Not especially impressive until you studied the eyes. Ice blue they were, and so cold they gave me a chill even in the ninety-plus heat on deck.

" 'What do you want here?' he said, with no other introduction at all. 'We seek no visitors. This island is dedicated to the Lord.'

"I introduced Joe and myself, but he paid no attention. I noticed his shabby but clean white suit, shirt and tieless stiff collar as he stepped down into the cockpit.

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Behind him, I saw a little skiff tied to the stern in which he had rowed himself out.

" 'Look!' he said suddenly, an expression of disgust crossing his features. 'You are bringing pollution with you. You slay the helpless creatures of the Lord!' With that he reached down and seized the bait bucket and emptied Oswald's bait, three of the big purple hermit crabs, over the side in one convulsive heave.

" 'Now, I say, just a moment, now,' said Joe, letting annoyance show through. 'Exactly who are you, and what's this all about? We've tried to be polite, but there are limits. . . .'

"The cold eyes swept over us again, and their nasty glint deepened. 'I am Brother Poole, son of the Founder. You would call me the Pastor, I suppose. The government of this blessed place is in my keeping. Once again, I say, who are you and what do you want?'

"Joe answered peaceably enough and re-introduced us, but he had obviously been doing some thinking while he listened to Poole.

" 'We just wanted to get some water and a little food,' said Joe, 'and some fresh fruit, before we go to Dominica. No law against going ashore on your island, is there?' He added, 'Isn't this British territory? Doesn't the Dominican governor ever allow people ashore here?'

"It was quite obvious that he had given Brother Poole something to chew on, you know. Whatever Poole's powers were on the island, he wasn't used to having them challenged. And it was evident from his hesitation that he didn't care for the remarks about the British or Crown government. You could see his bony face working as he grappled with the problem. Finally, something he must have thought was a smile struggled to get through. Frankly, I preferred his previous expression. A sanctimonious whine also crept into his hard voice.

" 'I regret my sharpness, gentlemen. We have so few visitors, mostly fishermen of loose morals. I am the guardian of our little Eden here, and I have to think of my flock. Of course, you may come ashore, and buy what you need. I only ask that you kill nothing, do no fishing while here, out of respect to our law.'

"We stated we had no intention of killing anything and said we'd come ashore after we cleaned up and had breakfast. He climbed back into his boat, but before he cast off, turned back to us.

" 'Please see that those two black heathen stay on your schooner. Their presence is not wanted on our island, where they might corrupt our people.' A good share of the original venom had come back in his speech.

"As he pulled away, I turned to Maxton and Oswald to apologize,

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but it was unnecessary. Their faces were immobile, but also, it seemed to me, a shade paler under their natural darkness. Before I could say anything, Maxton spoke.

" 'Don't worry about us, Sah. We hov no desiah to enter in thot place. It is of the utmost dislike to us, I ossuah you, Sah.'

"Well, Joe and I shaved, and put on clean clothes, and then rowed our dinghy into the empty dock. There was only one, and that one small. A lot of fishing boats, all under twenty feet, were moored to buoys and also pulled up on the sloping beach, where it existed, that is.

"The town lay before me to observe, as Joe was doing the rowing, and I had a full view from the stern. It looked pretty small, perhaps fifty houses all told, plus the one church we had spotted the night before, a steepled white thing with something metallic, not a cross, on the steeple, which caught the sunlight and reflected it blindingly.

"The houses were all white stucco, mostly palm-thatch roofed, but a few with rusting tin instead, and all set on short stilts a foot or so off the ground. You could have duplicated them on any other island in the Caribbean.

"A few coco palms grew here and there and some shortish trees, mostly in the yards of the houses. Behind the town, a low green scrub rolled away, the monotonous outline broken only by a few of the taller thatch palms. The whole place lay shimmering in the heat, because not a breath of air moved.

"And neither did anything else. A white figure on the end of the dock was Brother Poole, identifiable at long range as waiting for us. But behind him the town lay silent and still. Not so much as a dog or chicken crossed a yard or disturbed the dust of the white roads. It was, if anything, more eerie than the night before.

"We nosed into the dock, and Poole leaned down to catch the painter Joe flung up to him. We climbed up as he was securing it to a post. Then he stood up and faced us.

" 'Welcome to Soldier Key, gentlemen,' he said. 'I hope I did not appear too unfriendly earlier, but I have a precious duty here, guarding my flock. Although you are not of the Elect, I know you would not wish to bring disturbance to a pious community, which has cut itself off from the dross and vanity of the world.' He turned to lead us down the dock without waiting for an answer and threw another remark over his shoulder. 'The Governor of Dominica has given me magistrate's powers.'

"The carrot and the stick, eh! Joe and I exchanged glances behind his back.

"At the foot of the dock, Poole turned again, the cold eyes gleaming in the sunlight. 'I presume you

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wish to see our little town? You will find it quiet. This is a festival of our church, and all of our people rest during the day to prepare for the evening service, by fasting and by prayer. I would be doing so too, but for the duties of hospitality, which are paramount.'

"I had been trying to analyze his very odd accent since I'd first heard it. It was not West Indian, but a curiously altered Cockney, flat and nasal, something like the worst sort of Australian, what they call 'Stryne'. I thought then, and still think, that I know exactly how Uriah Heep must have sounded.

"As we walked up the silent main street, which lay dreaming in the white heat, our feet kicking up tiny clouds of coral dust, I suddenly saw something move in the shadow of a house. At first I thought it was a cat, then a large rat, but as it moved, it came momentarily into a patch of sunlight, and I stopped to stare.

"It was a soldier, a hermit crab, but enormous in size, at least a foot long, its naked body hidden in and carrying a huge conch shell as it scuttled clumsily along. As we came abreast of it, its stalked eyes seemed to notice us, and to my surprise, instead of retreating, it ran out toward us and stopped only a foot away. Its great orange and purple claws looked capable of severing one's wrist, or a finger, at any rate.

"Poole had stopped too, and then, reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a linen bag from which he extracted a strip of dried meat. He leaned down, do you know, and placed it in front of the crab. It seized it and began to shred it in the huge claws, passing bits back to its mouth, where other smaller appendages chewed busily. It was as thoroughly nasty a sight as I'd ever glimpsed. Also, I wondered at the meat.

" 'That's a monster,' I said. 'How on earth do you tame them? I had no idea they grew so big. And I thought you ate no meat?'

" 'They are not *tame,* as you in the gross world think of it,' said Poole sharply. 'They are our little brothers, our friends, as much a part of life as we, and all units of the great chain live here in peace, some higher, some lower, but all striving to close the great circle which holds us to the material earth, at peace, yet in competition, the lower sinking, failing, the higher mastering the lower, then aiding. It is all a part of—' His whining voice rose as he spoke, but then suddenly stopped as he realized that our expressions were baffled, unmoved by the exposition of his extraordinary creed. 'You would not understand,' he finished lamely, and pocketing the still unexplained meat, he turned to lead us on. We followed, glancing at one another. Behind us, the huge crab still crunched on its

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dainty, clicking and mumbling.

"Wrapped in thought about Poole and his religion, I really didn't notice that we had come to the town square, until I almost ran into Joe, who had stopped in front of me.

"Before us now stood the church we had glimpsed earlier, a massive, white-stuccoed structure with a pointed spire. As I looked up, I could see by squinting that the shiny object on the steeple was, indeed, not a cross. It was a huge crab claw, gilded and gleaming in the sunlight!

"My jaw must have dropped, because Poole felt it incumbent on himself to explain. 'We have abandoned the more obvious Christian symbols,' he said. 'And since our friends, the soldiers, are the commonest local inhabitants, we choose to symbolize the unity of all life by placing their limb on our little place of worship.'

" 'Rather! I can see it's their church,' said Joe pointing. 'Look there, Donald.'

"As he spoke, I saw what he had seen first, that the shadows around the base of the church were moving and alive—alive with the great hermit crabs.

"Large, small, and a few immense, they rustled and clanked in and around the coral blocks which formed the base, and the scrubby bushes which flanked the blocks, a sea of shells, claws, spiny legs and stalked eyes.

"Poole must have seen that we were revolted, because he moved on abruptly, leaving us no choice except to follow him. As we moved, I heard a distant human sound break the hot silence for the first time that morning, the sound of hammering. It came from our right, toward the edge of town, and peering down a sandy street in that direction, I thought I could identify the source as a long shed-like structure, about a third of a mile away.

" 'I thought everyone had retired to pray?' said Joe at the same moment. 'What's that hammering?'

"Poole looked annoyed. I never met a man less good at disguising his feelings, but since he normally never had to while on his island, it must have been quite hard to learn. Finally, his face cleared and the spurious benevolence gained control.

" 'A few of the men are working on religious instruments,' he said. 'We have a festival coming: we call it the Time of the Change, so there is a dispensation for them. Would you like to see them at work?'

"Since the silent town had so far yielded nothing of interest except the soldiers, which we loathed, we said yes.

"We came at length to one end of the long building, and Poole held aside a rattan screen door, so that we could go in first. A blast of

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frightful heat hit us in the face as we entered.

"Inside, the building was one long open shed, lit by vents in the walls, and by a fire which blazed in a trench running half the length of the structure. Several giant metal cauldrons bubbled over the fire, with huge pieces of some horn-like material sticking out of them.

"Over against one wall were several long benches, and at these, a number of bronzed white men, stripped to tattered shorts, were furiously hammering at more pieces of the horny substance, flattening it and bending it, forcing it into huge wooden clamps and vises and pegging it together.

"As we watched, several of them stopped work and seized a huge piece of the stuff and dragging it to the fire, dumped it into one of the giant pots. No one paid us the slightest attention, but simply kept working as though driven by some frantic need, some internal pressure. The whole affair was most mysterious.

"I stepped close to one of the pots to see if I could learn what it was they were working on, and as I looked I saw, to my amazement, it was tortoise shell.

"Now, a hawksbill sea turtle, the only known source of shell, seldom grows one much over a yard long, you know. The pieces these men were working on must have been made with many dozens of them at least. What on earth were they doing?

"Poole, who had been surveying our bewilderment with a sardonic smile, decided to mystify us further. Tapping Joe on the shoulder and pointing, he started walking down the length of the long shed, skirting the fires and the workmen, but ignoring them.

"His goal was the far left-hand corner, which we now saw had a palm-thatch curtain extending from floor to ceiling, masking what lay behind.

"With the air of a second-rate showman on his unpleasant face, he pulled on a rope and drew the high brown curtain aside. 'Behold our aim, gentlemen. Here is a fitting offering that we make for the altar of the Most High!'

"What we saw was certainly worth more than a little showmanship. Before us, poised on seven or eight large sawhorses, was a giant, gleaming shell, as if some colossal and quite improbable snail had washed up from the deeps of the sea. Golden, mottled and semi-translucent, it towered over our heads, and must have been at least twelve feet in diameter from the great opening in the base to the peak of the spiral tip. As we drew closer we saw that the whole marvelous object was artificial, being made of plates of overlapping tortoise shell pegged so cunningly that it was hard to see any joint. At one place on the side, a large

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gap showed where the work was not yet complete. Obviously, this was why the silent, half-naked workers were toiling so industriously. It was a very beautiful and awe-inspiring sight, if still a mysterious one.

"Poole drew the curtain closed and stood with his arms in his coat pockets smiling at our amazement. 'That's one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen,' I said, quite honestly. 'May I ask what you do with it when it's finished?'

"Some strong emotion flashed for a second across his face, to be replaced by a bland expression of benignity. 'We set it afloat on a large raft, surrounded by offerings of fruit and flowers,' he said. 'An offering to God, to be swept where He wills by the waves and winds.'

"Seeing our incomprehension at the idea of so much hard work going to waste, he elaborated, still smiling in his sneering way. 'You see, it takes a long time to make the shell. The whole community, our whole little island, participates. Men must catch turtles. Then they must be killed, as mercifully as possible, the shell cured in a special manner and so on, right up until the final work. Then, when we gather at the ceremony of departure, all our people share in the delight of speeding it forth. We feel that we send our sins with it and that our long labor and offering to God may help our souls to Paradise. A naive idea to you, cultivated men of the great, outside world, no doubt, but very dear to us. My father, of blessed memory, the Founder, devised the whole idea.'

"Actually, you know, the idea was a lovely and reverent one. It reminded me of the Doge of Venice marrying the Sea, and other ceremonies of a similar nature. Brother Poole must have spent some time indeed on the composition of his tale, for it was quite the pleasantest thing we had heard about the island.

"While he had been speaking, we had passed out of the shed into the glaring sunlight, which seemed cool after the inferno we had left behind us.

"As we stood blinking in the sun, Poole turned to us with the false benignity now vanished from his face. 'So, gentlemen, you have seen all there is to see of our little town. There is an important religious festival tonight, the launching of our offering. I must ask you to purchase such supplies as you need and leave before this evening, since non-believers are not permitted here during our holy night and day, which is tomorrow. I can sell you any supplies you may need.'

"Well, we had no reason to linger. Personally, as I said earlier, I had taken a profound dislike to the whole town and particularly to Brother Poole, who seemed to embody it, as well as actually to di-

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rect it. We walked to the wharf, discussing what we needed on the way. Poole seemed ready to sell fruit, bananas, mangoes and papayas, as well as bread, at perfectly honest prices, and offered us fresh water free of any charge at all.

"Only once did any hardness come back into his voice, and that was when I asked if any spiny lobsters, *langouste,* were for sale.

" 'We do not take life here,' he said. 'I told you earlier of our rule.'

"Joe could not help breaking in with an obvious point, although he should have known better when dealing with a fanatic.

" 'What about the turtles. You kill them for their shells and presumably eat the meat? And what about the fish you catch?'

"Poole looked murderous. 'We do not eat meat,' he snapped. 'You would not understand, being heretics, unaware of the Divine Revelation, but the turtles' deaths are allowable, since we beautify our offering to God with their shells. The greater cause is served through a smaller fault. Also, the fish are set aside to us as our portion, although a sinful one. But what is the use of explaining these holy things to you, since you have not seen the Light?'

"After this, he declined to say anything else at all, except to wish us a good journey in a furious voice and to add that our purchases and water would be on the dock in an hour. With that, he stalked off and disappeared around a corner of the street. Upon his departure, all movement ceased, and the town dreamed on, neither sound nor movement breaking the noon silence. Yet we both had the feeling that eyes watched us from behind every closed shutter and each blank, sealed window.

"We rowed back to the schooner in silence. Only when we climbed aboard, to be greeted by Maxton and Oswald, did our voices break out together, as if pent up.

" 'Appalling character, he was! What a perfectly hellish place! Did you feel the eyes on your back?' et cetera.

"Only after settling down and disposing of lunch, which the men had thoughtfully made in our absence, did we seriously talk. The conclusion we reached was that the British government and the local administration in Dominica needed a good jolt about this place, and that it ought to be thoroughly investigated to find out just how happy the locals really were about Brother Poole and his hermit crab church. Other than that, we decided the sooner we left, the better.

"During lunch we had seen some of the locals, all whites, manhandling a cart down on the dock, and unloading it. We now rowed ashore and found two large, cov-

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ered baskets of fruit, half a dozen loaves of new bread, and an old oil drum of water, which looked and tasted clean and fresh. We also found Poole, who seemed to appear out of the air and accepted the previously agreed-on payment for the food. When that was over and we promised to return the water drum after putting the water in our tank, he came to his official business again.

" 'Now that you have water, you can leave, I suppose,' he said. 'There is no further reason for interrupting our holy festivities?' His arrogant whine, half command and half cringe, was on the upsurge. It annoyed Joe as well as me, and his answer to the order, on the face of it, was quite natural, really.

" 'We'll probably use the land breeze this evening,' said Joe. 'Of course, we may decide not to. Your bay is so pretty. We like to look at it.'

" 'Yes,' I added, picking up his cue. 'You know how we yachtsmen are, passionate lovers of scenery. Why, we may decide to stay a week.'

"Of course we were only trying to get a rise out of the Reverend Poole, but he had absolutely no sense of humor. Yet he realized that we disliked him quite as much as he did us. His eyes blazed with sudden rage, and he half-lifted one hand, as though to curse us. But another expression crossed his face first, and the mask dropped again. He must have suddenly realized that he didn't have a pair of his co-religionists to deal with.

"Without another word, he turned on his heel and left, leaving us sitting in our rowboat staring at one another.

"We got the water, bread and fruit out, and I rowed back and left the empty oil drum on the dock. The town still lay as quiet as ever in the sun, and no breeze disturbed the few coco palms. From the pier, I could see no sign of any movement further in, and the harbor was like a mirror, on the reflection of which our schooner and the small, anchored fishing boats hung motionless in the heat.

"Back aboard again, I conferred with Joe, and then we told the two crewmen we would leave on the evening land breeze. The harbor was deep enough so that tide made no difference. We could have used our engine, of course, but we hated to do so when sails would do the work. Aside from disliking engines, as all who sail for pleasure do, we always thought of emergencies, when the fuel might be desperately needed.

"Oswald and Maxton brightened up when we said we were going, and had we left right then, I'm sure they would have offered to row, or swim, for that matter. Their dislike of Soldier Key had never been plainer.

"The afternoon drifted on, and

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again the tropical night came quickly, with no real evening. But there was no wind. The expected land breeze simply didn't appear. When this happens, one can usually expect it to come around midnight or a little after in these waters, although I have no idea why. We'd had it happen before, however, so we waited. Since we had anchor lights on, we were perfectly visible from shore, but tonight no lights at all showed there. There was no moon, but brilliant starlight, and we could see the outline of the shore and the loom of the buildings behind, as silent as ever.

"We decided to leave one man awake to look for wind, and the rest would turn in all standing, that is, dressed, not that we wore much but shorts. We could raise sail in no time. Oswald said he was not sleepy, and so he got the job.

"I don't know why I should have wakened at midnight. There was still no wind, and we had all been sleeping on deck. I looked at my watch, cast my eye along the deck to Maxton's and Joe's sleeping forms and then went aft to find Oswald. He wasn't there, so I looked forward again. No sign of him, and the starlight was clear enough to see from bow to stern. There was no use waking the others on a false alarm. I got up and dropped into the cabin, gave it a quick once over, and then came out of the forward hatch and went quickly aft to the stern. No Oswald.

"I woke the others quietly, and explained the situation in a few words. From the moment I spoke, none of us had any doubt as to what had happened. Oswald had never left voluntarily. Someone, or something, with human motivation, had plucked him off the schooner as easily as you gaff a fish and even more quietly, and the purpose and the strength had come from the silent town, from Soldier Key.

"We discovered afterwards that it had been easy for them. Several swimmers approached as silently as sharks and one of them had clipped Oswald over the head with a club as he sat with his back to the rail. Then, without a sound, he had been lowered into the bay and towed back to shore. Why they left the rest of us I shall never know, but I suspect that they simply had got cold feet. Or perhaps Poole thought we'd be reluctant to report our loss. By the time we got back with help, he could always plead ignorance and say that we had done the poor chap in ourselves. He of course would have his whole island to back him up. As a second purpose, I think he wanted us out of there and that this was perhaps a last warning. Well, if that were so, he had made a mistake.

"Without anyone's having to speak, all three of us went below and began to gather weapons. I took the big Colt automatic pistol, because it was my own, Joe the .30-.30 carbine, and Maxton sim-

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ply tucked his cane knife, a big machete, without which most West Indians feel undressed, in his belt. Then we collected ammunition and went aft to our dinghy. I hauled the painter in without even looking until the cut end came into my hand! I had not noticed its absence on my earlier check, but the Key men had cut it adrift.

"However, this actually didn't put us back a bit. Still without speaking, but all three purposeful, we began to rig a float for the weapons out of small line and four life preservers. We had it done and ready to move in less than ten minutes and were about to slip over the side when Maxton suddenly caught us by the arms and put a hand to his ear.

"As we listened in the quiet dark, a noise, almost a vibration began to come over the water. It was a sound we couldn't identify, a strange sort of muffled rustling or shuffling sound, and Joe and I looked at each other in the starlight, absolutely baffled. Maxton whispered in our ears.

" 'Dot is feet. Dey move somewheah.'

"Of course he was quite right. We were listening to the whole town on the move, the rustle of hundreds of feet scuffing through the coral dust of the streets. Where they were going we didn't know, but we began to drop into the water, because this silent march almost certainly meant no good to Oswald. We all three knew *that,* somehow. I took the lead, carrying the pistol out of the water, so that we should be armed upon landing. Behind me, Joe and Maxton swam, pushing the little raft with the rifle, the spare ammo, our shoes, and two canteens. Joe had added something else, but I didn't find that out until later.

"I swam for the edge of town way over on the left, well away from the dock or the boats, since I had to assume that if they had posted a sentry, he would be placed at that point. It apparently was quite unnecessary, but we had to try to outguess them at every point, and we still thought these people rational. I tried not to think of sharks, which I dislike.

"As we swam, I listened for the sound of the footsteps, but it had died away, and this lent new urgency to our efforts. In a very short time, my feet grated on the coral beach, and keeping the pistol poised, I waded ashore, the other two behind me. Joe had the rifle at ready now, and Maxton had drawn his machete.

"There was no sign of movement. We had landed just on the outer edge of town, the last house looming about two hundred feet to our right. Not a sound broke the silence but faint insect humming and the splash of ripples breaking on the narrow beach.

"After listening a minute, we put on our shoes, then divided the am-

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munition and the canteens. I saw Joe stick something else in his belt, but I was concentrating so hard on listening that it really didn't register.

"We placed the life preservers above the high water mark under a bush and moved into the town, guns at ready. If the town were quiet by day, it was dead that night. This was a town presumably inhabited by living people, but not a murmur of life came from any of the shuttered houses. At each corner, we stopped and listened, but we could hear nothing. Nothing human, that is. Twice I almost fired at rustling shadows and faint clanking noises, only to realize that it was only the hideous crabs from which the island took its name.

"The church was our goal, by unspoken agreement, but when we reached the square, it loomed silent and unlit in front of us. The central door was wide open, and we could hear no movement from the black interior. Wherever the people were, it was not there.

"Moving on, we struck a broader street, one which led away from the water inland. As we paused in the shadow of a tamarind tree, Maxton suddenly held up a hand and dropped to his knees. I couldn't make out what he was doing, but he stood up in a second.

" 'This dust has been kicked up wery recent. I think the people come this way, many people.'

"I couldn't smell anything, but Joe and I knew we didn't have his perceptions, and we had no other clues anyway. Besides, we had heard the marching feet, and they had gone somewhere, and then there was the singing of the previous night, too.

"Keeping to the edge of the road, we went inland, walking quickly, but very much on the alert. The road left the town, which wasn't too big, remember, after about two hundred yards and cut straight into the scrub, in the direction of the center of the island, as near as we could make out. At about fifteen minutes walk from the town, we learned that Maxton was right. We were deep in the shadowy scrub now, not a jungle, but the thick, low thorn bush of most West Indian islands. The road still ran straight and smooth ahead of us, a dim, white ribbon under the stars. Only insect noises broke the silence.

"Suddenly, we all halted. Not far off, a half mile at a guess, a sound had erupted into the night. We had heard it before, not so loud, on the previous night and recognized it at once for the mass chorus of human voices in a chant. It came from ahead of us and to one side, the left.

"Our pace quickened to a trot, and as we ran we listened, trying to pinpoint the noise. It was some sort of service, because we could hear the sound die into silence and then start again. As we drew closer to the source, we began to hear the single

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voice which led the chant, high and faint, and then the muffled roar that followed from the congregation.

"It was only the voices that saved us from missing the path. The trees had increased in height, and shadowed the road a good deal, so that we should have overshot the left fork if we hadn't been watching for it. Even then, Maxton was the only one to spot it, and he suddenly signaled us to turn into what looked like a dense bush. Following him, we broke through a screen of vegetation, which gave way so easily that we realized that it must have been dragged there after cutting. And there was a road again, narrower but still plain and well-trodden. Some old habit of caution must have led them so to mask their path. We now moved at an increased speed.

"Ahead of us, the voices swelled in another chant, but we could not as yet distinguish words. The single voice was silent. As the noise increased, so did our caution, and we slowed our pace, since we had no wish to burst unexpectedly into the middle of some gathering of goodness knows what.

"All at once, we could see light ahead through the trees, a flickering, reddish glow which lit the path far better than the dim starlight. We eased down to a slow walk and advanced cautiously.

"The light grew continually stronger as we went on, reflected back from our faces and the boles and leaves of the thorn bushes and palmettoes. The sound of voices was almost deafening now, but we were searching so hard for a sight of a guard or sentry, we paid no attention to the words, which were blurred in any case.

"The trees suddenly thinned before us, and stooping low, the three of us crawled abreast of their edge and peered into the open, keeping well behind the screening branches, and off the road, which suddenly appeared to vanish. When we reached the last line of bushes, it was easy to see why. We were gazing down into an immense pit.

"We were on one edge of an enormous hole in the ground, quite round and perhaps seventy feet deep. It was rimmed with greyish limestone rock, level at the edges, to which point the bushes grew, all around.

"At our feet, the path, now very narrow, wound down a steep slope to the smooth floor of white sand below. One side of the natural amphitheatre, for such it was, was banked up into lines of crude seats, sloping to the open floor of packed sand. The width of the whole place must have been at least two hundred yards in diameter, if not more.

"The entire population of Soldier Key, now silent, was sitting on the banked seats of this private arena, gazing at the scene before them with rapt attention. We had an excellent view of them, which

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made up in completeness for what we had missed earlier. Every man, woman and child, perhaps two hundred or more, was stark naked, clothed only in garlands of flowers and flower necklaces. Every single living soul on the island must have been there, and not a sound came from even the smallest baby at its mother's breast, or the oldest crone. I could see no colored people, but only whites. Apparently the creed of the New Revelation was not valid for any but Caucasians.

"Inching forward to get a better look, we were able to see what held their attention. Two great bonfires burned on the floor of the pit, and between them Brother Poole, the Shepherd of his people, was moving about. As naked as his flock, his scrawny white body gleaming as if oiled, he was capering in a strange way around three objects on the sand, between the fires.

"In the center, golden in the firelight, lay the immense shell we had seen earlier in the workshed in town. No holes now marred its perfection, and it lay gleaming and wonderful on one of its sides, the opening facing us as we watched.

"On either side of the shell, dwarfed by its bulk, were two bound human bodies! One was Oswald. He was not only bound but gagged. As far away as we were, we could see his eyes roll and the muscles under his dark skin strain as he tried to break his bonds. The other figure was that of a white girl, perhaps fifteen or so from her build. She lay silent and unmoving, but I could see that her eyes were open. Around the three, the shell and the bodies, Brother Poole danced and waved his hands, as if in some maniac's parody of a benediction. Although he was otherwise quite nude, he wore a strange necklace, of some hard, purplish objects, which bounced and shook as he moved. So silent were the people that even as high as we were lying, I could hear the click and rattle of them. The sound jogged my memory, until I suddenly realized why it was familiar. He was wearing a necklace of hermit crab claws and the noise was just as if some of them were scuttling about.

"I stated that the pit was circular. The floor was level, sloping up on one side to the packed earth seats of the people, and on the other side to the limestone walls. Nothing grew on these smooth walls, excepting only in one place, directly opposite the seats, where dense canopies of some creeper hung down, half obscuring a great triangular opening or cleft in the rock, about twenty feet in height and at least that wide near the base. Pressed against the cliff to one side of this hole, was a massive, now open door or gate, made of bulky timbers in a heavy frame. It was hung on great iron hinges driven into the rock. Could this be the Gate of which Poole claimed to be the Opener, I wondered? In front

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of the hole, and a little to one side, there was a still pool of water, probably a spring. Directly across from us, a path similar to that below us wound up the cliff face and vanished into the dark fringe of foliage at the top.

"Brother Poole suddenly ceased his capering and raised both hands. He was now facing the dark opening across the arena, and to this he addressed his invocation. I cannot at this date give it word for word, but roughly it went rather like this:

'Oh, Lord of Majesty, Incarnation of Survival, Manifestation of Nature and its struggle, Devourer of Sin and the Flesh, have mercy upon us.'

"Behind him a roar arose as the crowd repeated the last line, 'have mercy upon us.' He continued:

'Have mercy, Oh Thou, Shelled in Adamant. Of Thy mercy, accept our offerings, a new home for Thy greatness, new life for Thy limbs, new viands for Thy table. Enter now upon Thy new home and partake of Thine offerings.'

"This rather unpleasant parody of a communion service seemed extraordinarily unreal, it was so fantastic.

"In the red light, Poole's gaunt face, now drooling slightly, assumed an air of repellent majesty. Much as he disgusted me, the creature did have a certain hypnotic power at that moment. He believed in what he was doing. Behind his back, his audience sat rapt and expectant, all of them, old and young, leaning forward in the same tense pause of anticipation. As he ceased to speak, time almost seemed to stop, and he held his hands out, facing the opening in the rock wall.

"Joe broke the spell, pushing the rifle at me and snatching the Colt from my limp hand.

" 'Stay here and cover us,' he hissed. 'Maxton and I are going down.'

"The two of them moved like cats, breaking from the scrub and racing down the path below me with driving steps. My brain cleared and I aimed the loaded rifle at Poole. If anybody went, he certainly would be the first.

"Maxton and Joe were on the sandy floor of the pit before anyone even noticed them. Joe had a clasp knife in one hand and the pistol in the other, and he flashed behind Poole's back and stoppped to cut the girl's bonds. Behind him, Maxton was doing the same for Oswald with the edge of his machete.

"A chorus of screams from the crowd announced that not all of them were in a trance, but none of them moved. I refocussed on Poole, but he still faced the cave, apparently lost to the actual world, entranced in an ecstasy of religion.

"Then, I caught a flicker of movement from the corner of my right eye and risked a glance in that direction. What I saw made my rifle fall with a thud to the earth.

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"Framed in the entrance to the cleft was Horror incarnate. Poised on giant, stalked legs, monstrous, incredible gleaming in the firelight, stood the Soldier of Soldier Key, the Living God of Brother Poole and his awful church.

"The giant purple and orange claws, the larger of the two at least six feet long, were held in front of the mass of clicking, grinding mouth parts. From the stalked eyes held out ten feet above the ground, to the great, red-pointed legs, jointed and barbed with three inch spines, there stood complete and perfect a hermit crab that must have weighed not less than a thousand pounds.

"As it moved slowly forward from the mouth of its private cave, the dragging shell which covered its soft body and rear end became visible, and I saw the true reason for the labor of the whole island. It, the shell, was made of tortoise shell, still recognizable though dirty and scarred, and although enormous, it was obviously too small. The soft body bulging from the opening must have desperately needed more room. The purpose of the new and larger shell, which still lay sparkling on the sand, was now clear. The god was to have a new house.

"As all this flashed through my mind, I recovered my wits and snatched up the rifle again. It was as well I did, because now things were starting to break down on the pit floor.

"Emerging from his trance, Poole had turned around and had seen before his dumbfounded eyes his sacrifices no longer neatly tied up but actually escaping. Joe had the limp body of the girl over one shoulder, and Maxton was aiding Oswald to follow in the direction of the foot of the nearer path, just beneath my own position.

"With a shriek, Poole summoned his nude worshippers to the assault. 'Blasphemy! Slay the desecrators of the shrine! Kill them, in the sight of the Living God!'

"With a roar, the whole mob poured off its earth benches and rushed for the three figures which ran slowly across the sand. Poole stood where he was, his hand raised in a curse, his face now wholly evil, working with madness in the firelight. Behind him some few yards, that unbelievable crustacean had paused, immobile, like a bizarre statue, motionless save for the moving, twitching mouth parts.

"I think to this day we would have been dead men, but for two factors. Joe, heavily burdened, Maxton and Oswald were still thirty feet from the path's entrance. Behind them, the horde of frantic, raving islanders were no more than a hundred paces. I had begun to shoot, forgetting Poole, firing at the foremost men instead, and hitting at once, but it did no real good. Those behind simply leapt the prostrate bodies and came on. One rifle simply could not stop this gibber-

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ing, animal horde. But something else could.

"Above the howling of the pack and the bark of my rifle rang out a scream so awful and agonized that I can still hear it in my sleep. No one could have ignored that dreadful cry. With three exceptions, everyone halted to see the cause.

"Brother Poole had momentarily forgotten his god, but his god had not forgotten him. As he stood there launching curses and hellfire, the monster, irritated no doubt by all the noise and movement, had come from behind and now clutched him in its titanic, larger claw, as firmly as its little brothers would hold a grasshopper. Suddenly, with no apparent effort, it simply closed the claw, and before our eyes, the two halves of the screaming Shepherd of the Island fell to the sand in a fountain of blood.

"The three below, however had not halted nor seen this sight, but were now steadily coming up the path. I resumed my ineffective rifle practice, for with fresh screams of rage, the mob of worshippers surged forward again, and began to gain. But Joe changed that.

"He halted and allowed Oswald and Maxton to run past. Dumping the girl, who had never moved at all, to the ground, he reached for his belt and pulled out a bulky metallic object which I now saw for the first time in the firelight. It was the schooner's flare pistol.

"Aiming at the center of the oncoming crowd, he fired straight into them, and then the flare exploded somewhere in the mass in a blast of white incandescence. At the same instant, I had a stroke of genius, and almost without thinking, I shifted my sights and squeezed off a shot at that incredible horror, the Soldier, aiming directly for the center of the head, and just over the grinding mouth parts.

"In the twin lights of the flare and the still-blazing fires, I caught a glimpse of Hell. Blackened figures writhed in agony on the ground, and others, their hair ablaze, ran aimlessly about, shrieking in pain and fright. But this was not all. My bullet must have wounded the Soldier in its tenderest parts. Raising its great shell off the ground and snapping its giant claws, it rushed at the nearest humans in a frenzy, not gripping and holding, but instead slashing and flailing about with its colossal pincers. That a creature of its bulk could move with such speed was a revelation to me, of an unsought kind. I remember seeing a screaming child crushed flat by a great leg.

"I was no longer firing, but simply watching the base of the path with one eye and the terrible scene below with the other. In only a few seconds, Maxton's and Oswald's heads appeared just below me, as they climbed panting from the inferno below.

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"A little behind them came Joe, reloading as he ran and checking his backtrail as he paused at the bend in the path. The girl was gone.

"I rose and covered the path behind them as they reached level ground. 'That lunatic girl got up and ran back into the crowd,' gasped Joe. 'To hell with her. Let's get out of here.'

"With me to the rear covering the retreat, we stumbled off down the track to the main road. In a minute the edge of the cliff was lost to view, and only the red glow on the leaves and the appalling sounds remained to tell us of what we had left behind. Breathless with shock and fright, we ran on at our best speed under the stars and trees until we reached the road and only a far-off wailing came to our ears.

"As we ran, I tried to make some sense out of what I had seen. In only a few moments, a maze of jumbled thoughts poured through me. How had that incredible thing been grown? How long had it lived? How many people had died to feed it? As the sound of anguished voices died away, my brain simply gave up, and I devoted myself to breathing and moving. Thinking back now, I believe that somehow, through their insane religion, the islanders had created a miracle of biology, taking a tiny animal and forcing its size somehow until no natural sea shell would contain it, and then building artificial ones to house its increased growth. But now, of course, no one will ever know the answers.

"There was no pursuit, I may say. The whole population of the island had been in that shambles of a pit, and we simply walked, for we could no longer run, back to the town and along the beach to our piled and tied life preservers. Within an hour of leaving the Amphitheatre of the Crab, we were climbing wearily over the side of the schooner. It took us only a few minutes to start the engine and get in the anchor, and then we were underway. Checking my watch, I found it was 4:30 a.m., although it seemed that a week had gone by.

"At blazing dawn, the island was only a faint blur on the horizon, which soon sank into the sea, leaving us feeling that we had been in a bad dream.

"No, we never called at Dominica. The four of us talked it over and decided not to.

"Look here, you fellows, we had probably killed, at a minimum, twenty or so souls, directly by flare or gunfire, and more still through the agency of the Soldier. By the time any representatives of the law arrived, what evidence would they find in our favor? Whatever governing group or person took over from Poole would have the whole island behind him or it. Who would believe our story? No one.

"No, we did nothing, at least at the time. We sent an anonymous letter to the Colonial Office and a

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copy to the Dominican Administrator later on, saying nothing at all about giant crabs, but demanding an inquiry into voodoo murders and local affairs generally. I have never heard that anything came of it, and as I told you earlier, the people were almost wiped out by the hurricane of the following year.

"But I don't eat lobster or crab. It came too close to being the other way round, you see? Anyone care for bridge?"

Williams managed to grunt. We would hear from him later on, no doubt.

(*from page 5*)

The world knew Tony Boucher as a one-man Renaissance, writer, editor, scholar, critic, connoisseur, radio personality, leading figure in his political party and his church, unquellable in all causes that he believed would further the good of the humanities and humanity. Those of us who had the fortune to share some of his own days knew him as far more besides. To us he was gentleness, loyalty, wit, intelligence, understanding, and love. Only now do we begin to see how much he gave us—and, while we remain, will always give.

—POUL ANDERSON

About a quarter of a century ago, Anthony Boucher came to see me, bearing a stone from the Fortean Oakland rock fall. It was our first personal meeting. In the years since, he became my editor on more than one magazine, my kindest critic and most faithful advocate, my fellow-officer in the Mystery Writers of America, and my dear friend. It was largely owing to his interest that I was able to have first my magazine true crime articles and then my mystery short stories published as books. We shared our birthday—23 years apart—and he had and will always have a very special place in my regard. So multifarious were his concerns and talents that he leaves a void that no one individual will be able to fill again. I shall miss him for all the time I have left.

—MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD

I remember Tony best from the days of the 1955 Cleveland Convention. He was Master of Ceremonies, then—at the banquet, officially; at every other occasion, unofficially. Tony was made for Conventions, for those little bits of Paradise pinched out of the workaday world. He was *the* True Conventioneer, and all the gatherings of science fiction fans will be the sadder, in spirit and in fact, for his going. But in some ghostly Convention, where Hugo Gernsback, Frank Paul, E. E. Smith, Fletcher Pratt and all the other yester-greats now foregather, he is Master of Ceremonies still.

—ISAAC ASIMOV

(*to page 130*)

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(*from page 128*)

Often, in grief, the throat grows so tight with tears one's voice won't work. The other voice—the one that dictates the words to be set on paper—can fail, too, and mine fails me now.

In his last letter to me Tony wrote "Does it sometimes seem to you that everybody is dying?"

Yes, dear Tony, it does.

—MILDRED CLINGERMAN

Anthony Boucher, during the sixteen years I knew him, was the friendliest, most understanding man I have ever known. As an editor and as a critic, he achieved an almost unique balance between honesty and compassion for those writers with whom he dealt. As a friend, I shall treasure him forever.

—RANDALL GARRETT

All of us who had the privilege of working with Tony Boucher had the greatest respect and admiration for Tony—a sensitive writer, a great editor, a cultured man. His too infrequent visits to the office in New York were occasions for joy and pleasure with a warm, kindly man. He will be missed.

—JOE FERMAN

With the passing of Anthony Boucher, the world has lost not one talent but many—for he was the closest to being The Compleat Man of anyone I've ever known. Short story writer, novelist, essayist, critic, editor and anthologist in several fields; wit, lecturer, limerickist, literary consultant, script-writer, expert on football and opera, light and grand; drama-lover and *aficionado* of the antic arts, panelist, radio host, toastmaster, Sherlockian, connoisseur of food and drink, devotee of poker, political analyst, scholar—I knew him in these roles and am sure he was outstandingly effective in many more. To everything he brought an *enthusiasm* which enriched our own lives even as it did his own. To those of us who had personal contact with the man himself there was an added quality to appreciate; a sort of sheer delight in life and living which he conveyed and communicated to all around him. Tony will be missed and mourned, but few have left behind such happy memories for so many.

—ROBERT BLOCH

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Touch-down on the moon, from 2001: A Space Odyssey (see page 61)

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